

ASK OUR VETERINARIANS



Are Bengal Cats Really Immune to Feline Leukemia?

Bengals are beautiful, intelligent and sometimes naughty cats that make great pets for the right owner. However, there seems to be a persistent myth that Bengal cats have some natural immunity to the feline leukemia virus. Is it true? If not, how did this myth get started? Turns out, it all goes back to the origins of this beautiful breed.

The Bengal breed was originally developed in the 1970's as a cross between our domestic cat and a small exotic wild cat known as the Asian Leopard Cat. A doctor by the name of Willard Centerwall used the resulting hybrid cats in order to study the feline leukemia virus and other illnesses of immunocompromised individuals. The Asian Leopard Cat was found to have a natural genetic resistance to the feline leukemia virus, but sadly the resulting crosses and our modern Bengal breed did not receive this trait. Bengal cats today have the beautiful spotted coat of the Asian Leopard Cat, but it turns out that they are susceptible to the feline leukemia virus just like any other breed of cat. Bengals who spend time outdoors or who are exposed to other cats should be vaccinated against feline leukemia for protection. By the way, the Asian Leopard Cat's scientific name is *Prionailurus bengalensis*. The Bengal breed is believed to take its name from the species name *bengalensis* and not from the Bengal tiger as some people have thought.

So, while a good cat breeder should be testing his or her breeding cats for leukemia and keeping cats in a safe, indoor environment to ensure that they do not carry feline leukemia, Bengals have no special immunity to feline leukemia or any other disease. And while it is possible that an individual family line may be sensitive to certain drugs or vaccines, in general, purebred cats, including Bengals, have no more sensitivity to drugs, vaccines or anesthetics than any other cat.

Information taken from www.bengalcatworld.com and bengalsillustrated.com

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