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Feline Blood Donors and *Bartonella*

Evolving recommendations on screening blood donors for *Bartonella*!

After 15 years of this laboratory urging veterinarians to test their cat blood donors for *Bartonella*, there is a growing consensus for the recommendation that cat blood donors be screened for *Bartonella*. Even though it has been known for more than 20 years that healthy cats can have prolonged *Bartonella* bacteremia, and that cats can transmit *Bartonella* to people, there has been slow progress in the right direction with the just published European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases (ABCD) Guidelines for Blood Transfusion in Cats, July 2015.



Don't take the risk of transfusing zoonotic *Bartonella*.

European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases (ABCD) Guidelines for Blood Transfusion in Cats: Guidelines for minimizing risks of infectious iatrogenic complications. J Feline Med Surg 17, 588-593, July 2015. These guidelines, published this month, give the clearest and most practical recommendations for selecting cats as donors and screening them for pathogenic microorganisms. They give a list of “core pathogens for worldwide screening of candidate cat blood donors.” This list includes: FeLV, FIV, *Mycoplasma haemofelis*, *Candidatus Mycoplasma haemominutum*, *Candidatus Mycoplasma turicensis*, and *Bartonella* species. For *Bartonella* they recommend serology and/or PCR testing. They also recommend that free-roaming cats and cats with fleas and ticks should never be used as donors.

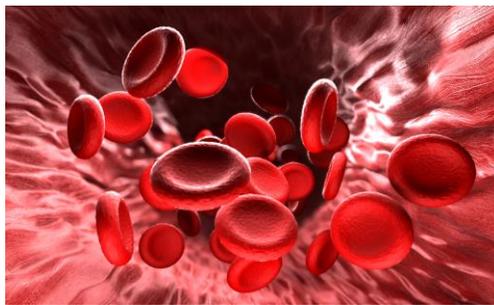
American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine Consensus Statement: Canine and Feline Blood Donor Screening for Infectious Disease. J Vet Intern Med 19:135-142, 2005.

This consensus statement, now 10 years-old, leaves the recommendation for *Bartonella* screening of cat blood donors ambiguous and behind the recommendations put forth by their European feline disease counterpart, the ABCD. Their recommendation is reproduced verbatim here: “The panel was divided on screening recommendations for *Bartonella*. All authors felt it would be ideal to strive for a *Bartonella*-free donor pool, but several factors, including the potential pathogenicity and

epidemiology for feline bartonellosis, led to a division of the panel on whether or not to categorize feline bartonellosis in the recommended or conditional group. Four of 7 authors recommended routine screening of feline donors, with seropositive, PCR positive or blood culture-positive cats excluded from donation. Three of 7 authors felt that the lack of current information on the pathogenicity of the organism and the possibility of a high prevalence of pre-existing infections in some areas warranted a conditional recommendation.” We feel the title of this consensus is inappropriate as the screening is for pathogenic infectious **microorganisms**, NOT “Infectious Diseases” as the selected donor cats must be judged as healthy before being tested, not for a “disease” but for a “microorganism.” Such imprecise terminology has persisted in the veterinary field with the use of such terms as “the feline leukemia test or feline leukemia vaccine” which have been used incorrectly for more than 40 years. The correct terms should be the “feline leukemia virus test and feline leukemia virus vaccine,” since only a small percentage of the FeLV pathogenicity results in “leukemia.” The ABCD do use correct scientific terminology in their guidelines.

National Veterinary Laboratory Recommendations for Screening Cat Blood Donors:

We are the oldest private veterinary laboratory in the country and have spent 43 years testing cats for blood-borne infectious microorganisms: FeLV, FIV and *Bartonella*. In fact, we invented the first test for FeLV, the FeLV immunofluorescent test in 1972 and, using this test, discovered the infectious spread of the virus among cats. We were the first laboratory to make a practical and economical *Bartonella* serologic test, the western blot FeBart® Test, available to veterinarians. We have tested thousands of potential cat blood donors over the last 43 years.



We recommend that all potential cat blood donors be tested for FeLV, FIV and *Bartonella*. This recommendation includes hospital derived cat donors and commercial blood bank cat donors. Testing cat blood donors for FeLV is intended to prevent a cat pathogen iatrogenically infecting a recipient cat, whereas testing cat blood donors for *Bartonella* is to prevent *Bartonella*-induced diseases in the recipient cats but **ALSO** to prevent the possible infection of the recipient cat who will then become a reservoir and possible vector for the zoonotic *Bartonella* pathogens and thus become a danger to the people living with their pets. This “One Medicine” goal should be enough for the veterinary societies and expert panels to **strongly** recommend that all cat blood donors, be screened for *Bartonella* infections.

NVL Blood Donor Screening Program:

As a service to the profession, we will test **FIVE** potential blood donor cats for FeLV, FIV and *Bartonella* from your hospital **at no charge**. In addition, we will test additional cat blood donors at a 50% discount.

Conflict of Interest Statement:

Dr. William D. Hardy, Jr., is the sole owner of the National Veterinary Laboratory, Inc., and the National Veterinary Laboratory Inc. performs testing for FeLV, FIV and *Bartonella* species.