

FELINE FIBROSARCOMA (INJECTION-SITE SARCOMA)

Fibrosarcoma is a cancer arising from connective tissues of the body, usually under the skin. An increase in the incidence of sarcomas in cats was recognized in the early '90s and they appeared to be associated with the areas of vaccine injections or other injections. These tumors are often referred to as “injection-site sarcomas”. The prevalence of these tumors is reported to average 1 in 10,000 vaccines administered. These tumors can develop as early as 2 months or as late as 10 years after vaccination or injection. Injections other than vaccines have also been implicated in the development of these tumors. It is thought that there is an underlying genetic predisposition in some cats for developing this cancer, although we have not yet determined the linkage.

A needle aspirate or tissue biopsy is often performed to diagnosis this cancer. Although fibrosarcomas are not highly likely to metastasize (spread) to other parts of the body, ~25% of patients with this cancer will develop metastasis, usually to the lungs. For this reason, chest x-rays or a lung CT scan are recommended to evaluate the lungs for any evidence of metastasis. Unfortunately, some patients whose x-rays are normal at the time of diagnosis still have the potential to develop metastasis in the future even after tumor removal.

Wide surgical excision is the primary treatment option for this cancer. Injection-site sarcomas are locally aggressive tumors that invade deep into surrounding tissue by means of finger-like projections. Because these projections are difficult to see with the naked eye and are difficult to completely remove with surgery, most tumors will recur after surgical excision. Tumors occurring on the limbs are more likely to be cured, although aggressive surgical removal with amputation of the limb is usually necessary. Because so many of these tumors occur between the shoulder blades and on the trunk, complete surgical removal may be difficult if arising in this area. CT scanning is often performed prior to surgery to determine the extent and invasiveness of the tumor and see if surgical removal is feasible. Consultation with a board-certified surgeon is recommended to evaluate surgical options with research showing a reduced risk of tumor recurrence in cats undergoing more aggressive surgery.

Radiation therapy may also be recommended as a follow-up treatment after surgery in cases where all of cancer cells could not be removed (“dirty margins”). This treatment consists of radiation given into the tumor or surgical scar and nearby tissues to attempt to kill any remaining cancer cells and stop their growth. Radiation therapy is unfortunately not available at Animal Cancer Center of Texas, but a referral can be provided to the nearest radiation oncologist if this treatment is recommended for your pet.

Other treatment options may be available including electrochemotherapy, traditional chemotherapy, or targeted chemotherapy treatments for pets with tumors that are not completely removed, recurrent tumors, those with metastasis, more aggressive tumors, or in pets that are not able to undergo surgical removal of the tumor.

Please remember that each patient is an individual and can have variable presentations of their cancer and response to treatment. Specific details and recommendations for your pet can be discussed in detail during a consultation with the oncologists at the Animal Cancer Center of Texas.