Cats Protection's guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing

The following FIV and FeLV test result flow charts should be used as guidance for the management of cats in Cats Protection's care and interpretation of test results.

There may be situations not covered or requiring a different procedure, in which case, the Cats Protection representative or vet should contact the Veterinary Department via veterinary@cats.org.uk.

Confirmation of a positive screening test results for Cats Protection cats should be carried out as follows:

FIV confirmation in apparently healthy cats:

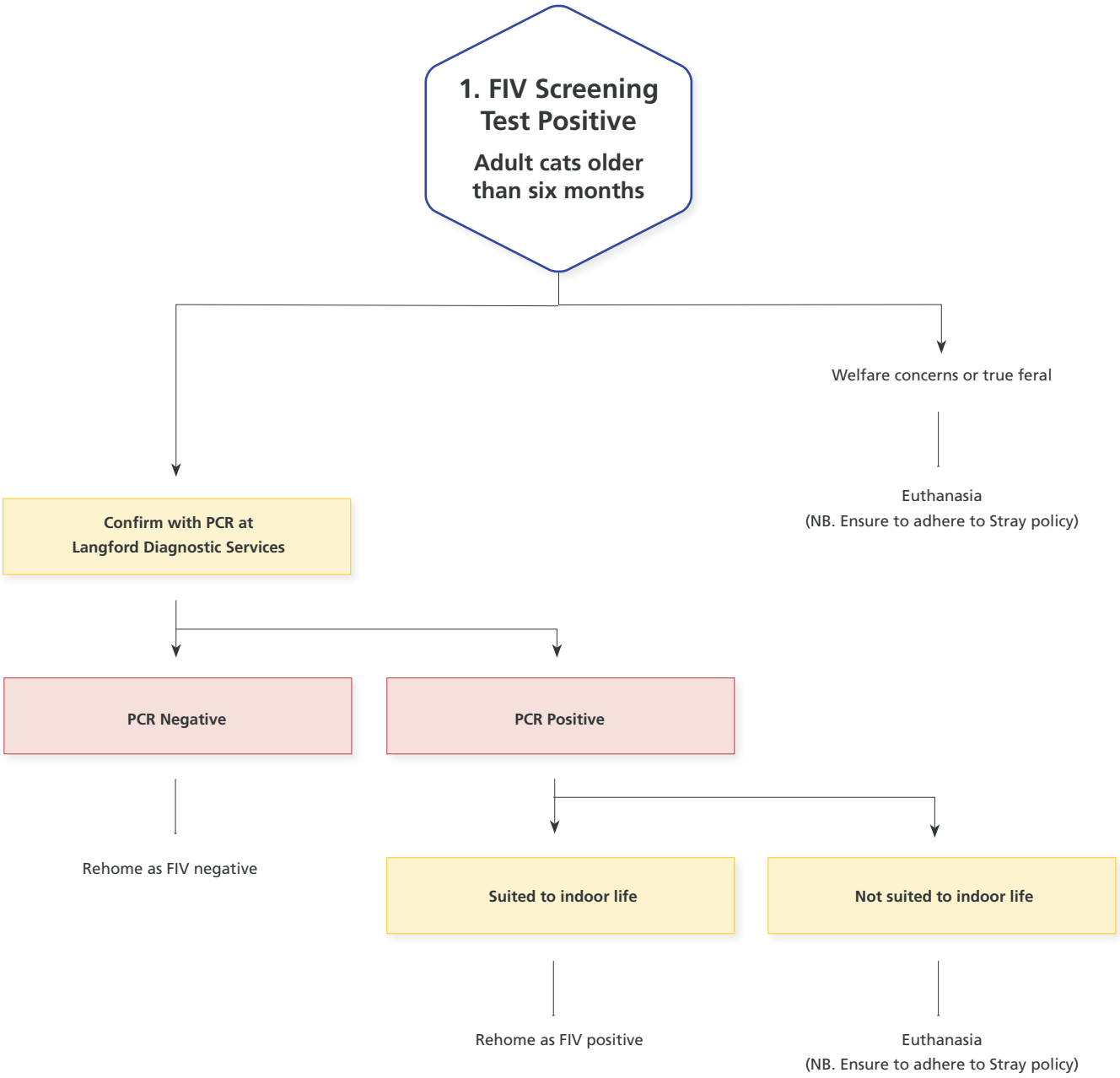
• Kittens and adults – DNA qPCR test at Langford Veterinary Diagnostics, Bristol, using an EDTA blood sample. Cats Protection submission forms for discounted PCR can be found at www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-products-and-discount-schemes

FeLV confirmation in apparently healthy cats

• We would not recommend PCR testing, but prefer that HEPARIN AND EDTA blood samples are sent to Veterinary Diagnostic Services, Glasgow for virus isolation. Submission forms can be found on Glasgow's Vet Diagnostic Services website. CP does not currently hold a discount for the cost of FeLV confirmation testing.

Although many confirmatory laboratories like to do an ELISA test as well, Cats Protection does not recommend this, as an in-house screening test will have already been performed. Cats Protection can consent to this if the laboratory wishes to perform a repeat screening test free of charge for their own comparative purposes, but the charity does not see a need to pay for it.

Cats Protection's guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing



Key

FIV = Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

PCR = polymerase chain reaction test

Langford Diagnostic Services = specific, specialist external laboratory

This flow chart is for guidance only

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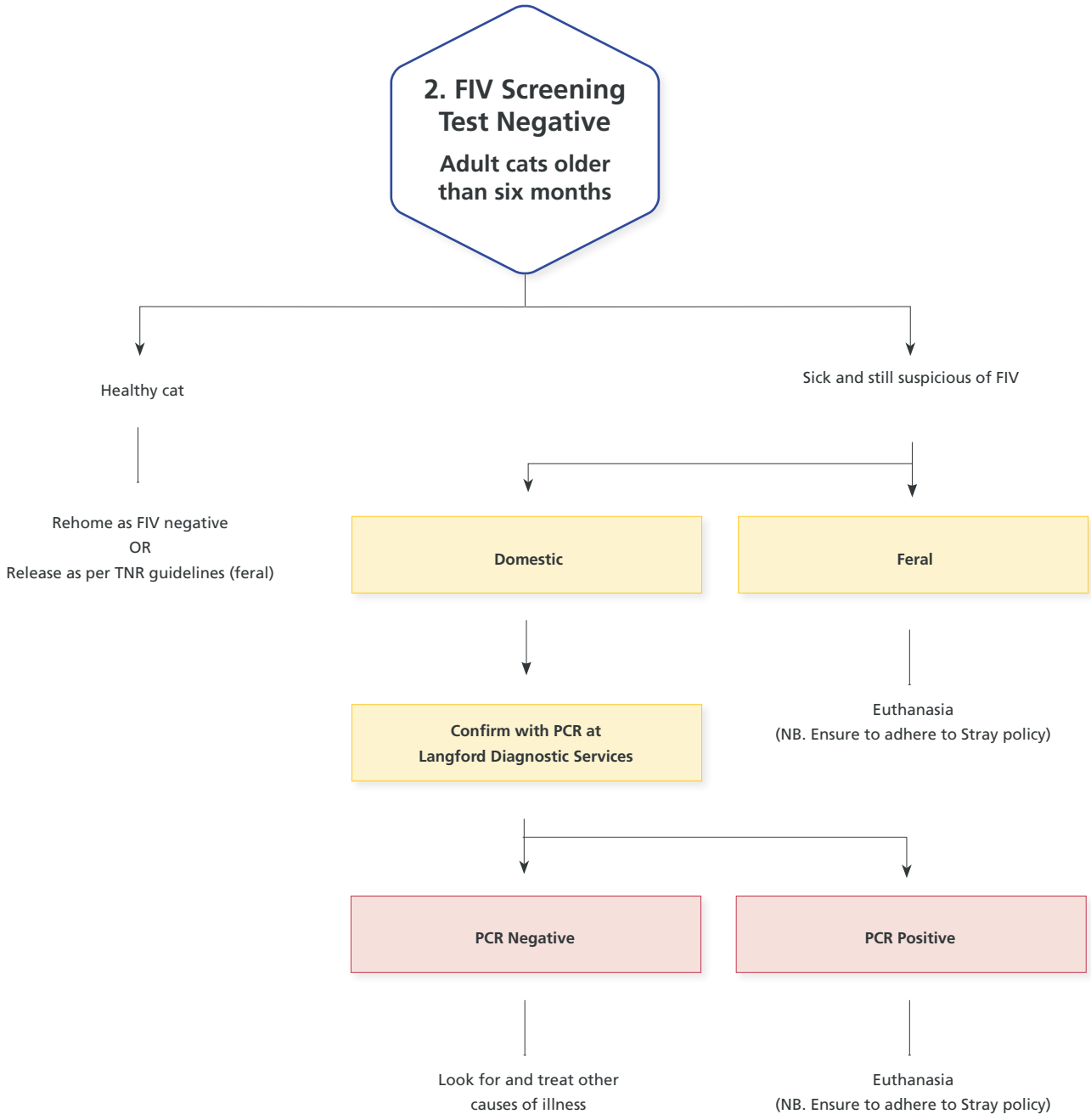

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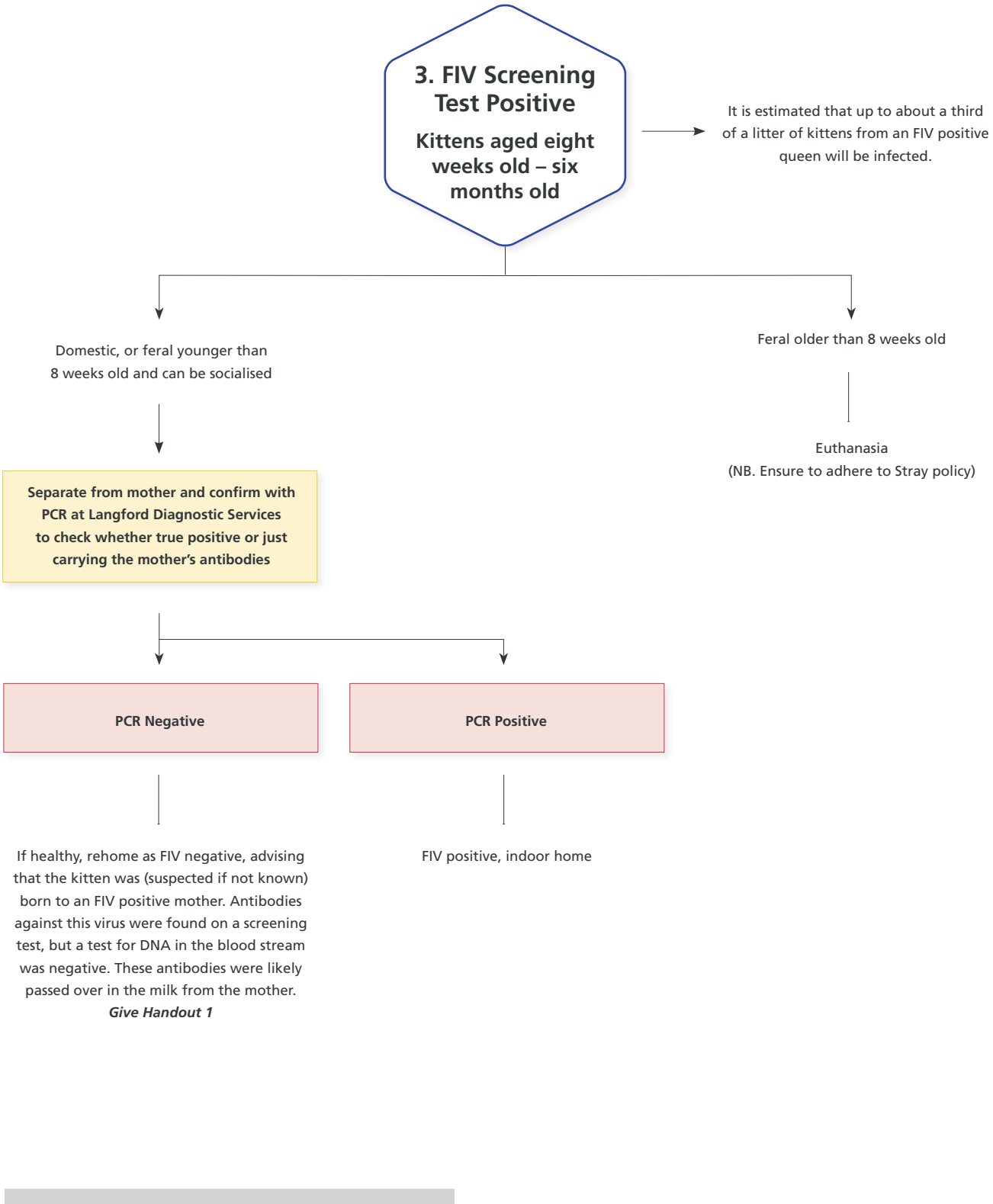

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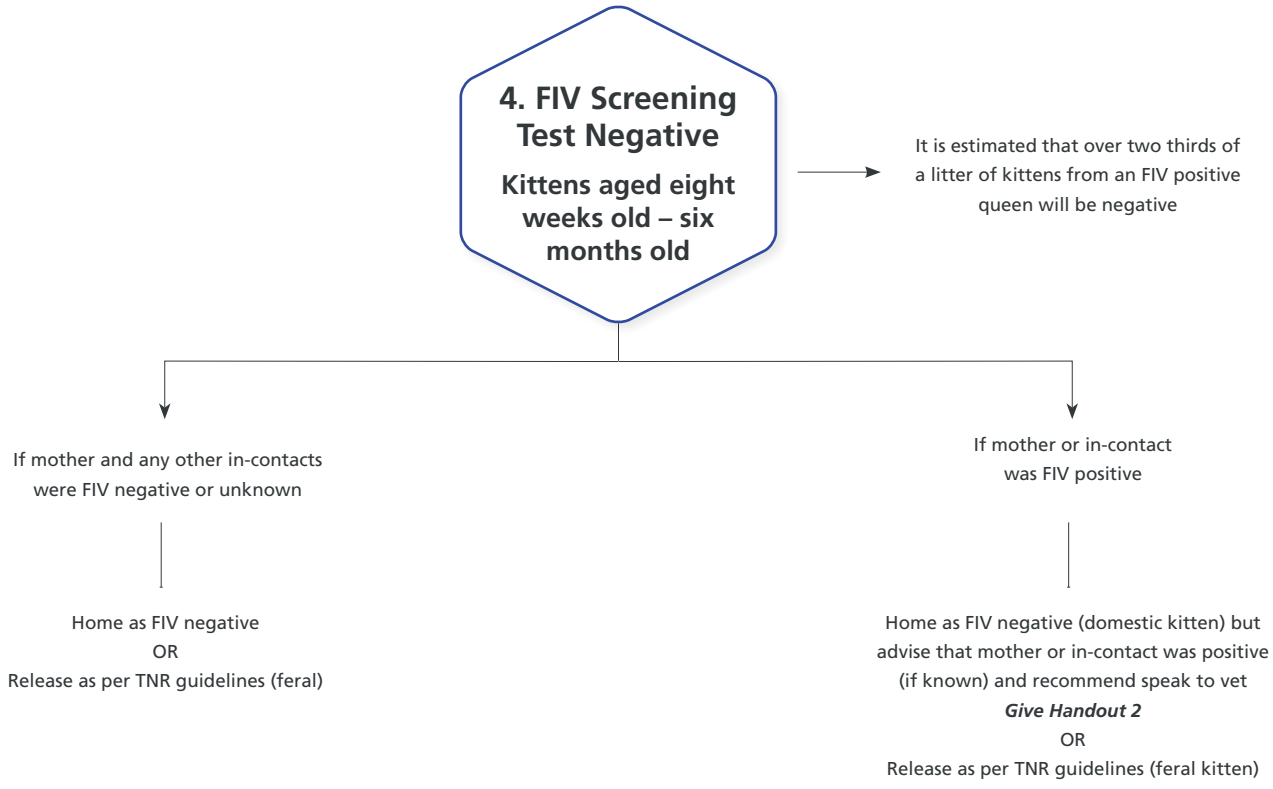

Key

FIV = Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

TNR = trap, neuter, return

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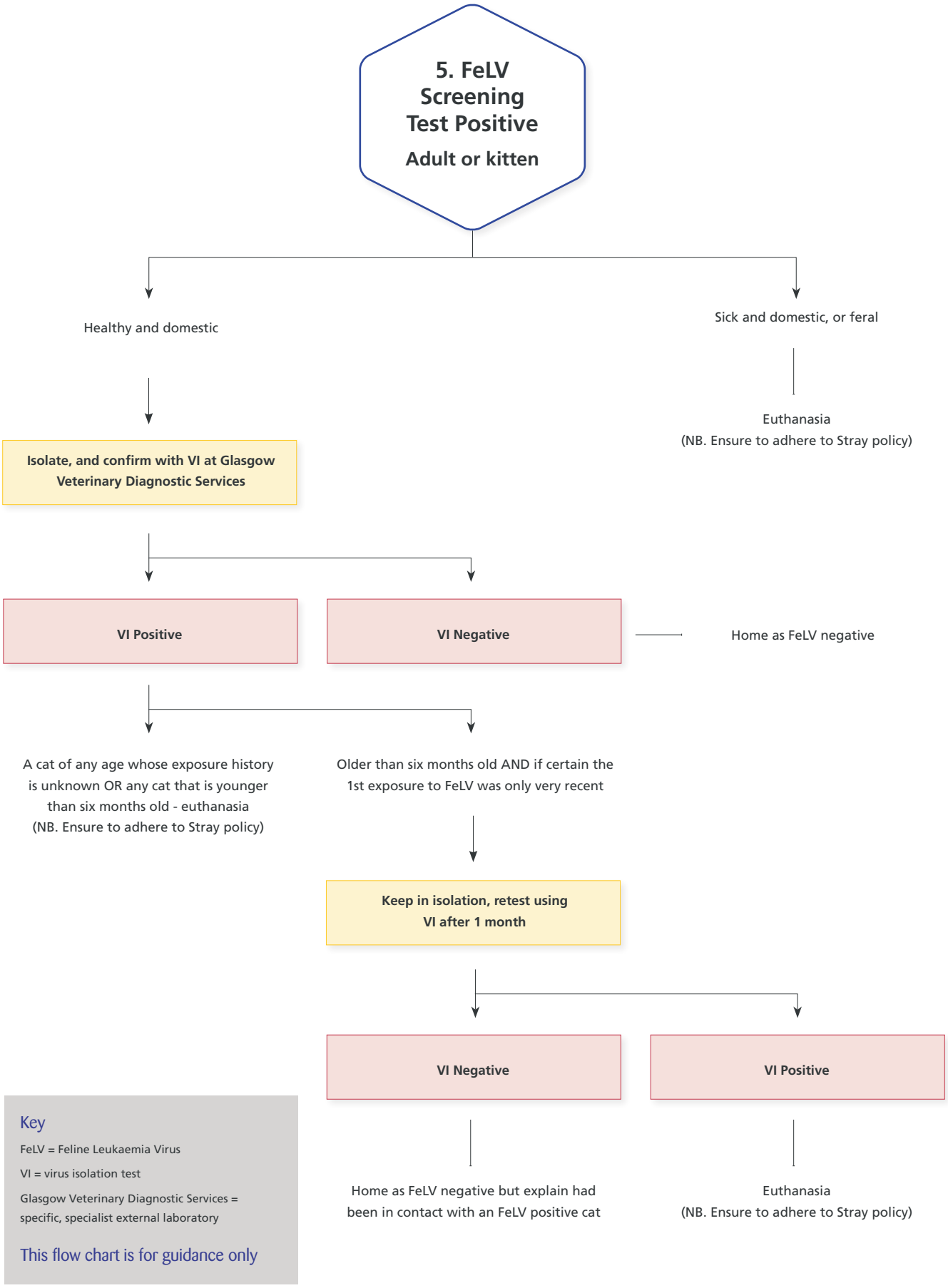


Key

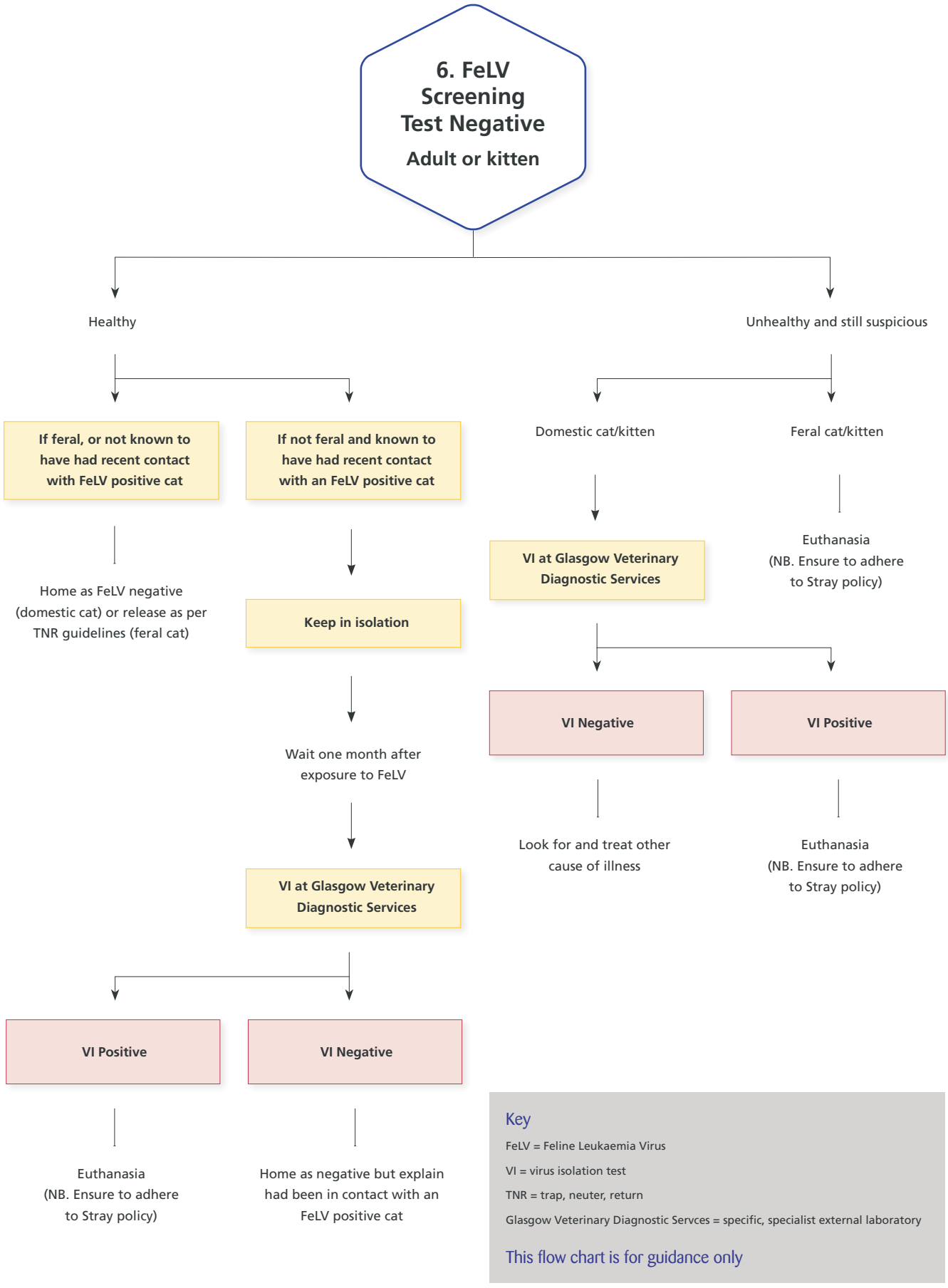
FeLV = Feline Leukaemia Virus

VI = virus isolation test

Glasgow Veterinary Diagnostic Services = specific, specialist external laboratory

This flow chart is for guidance only

Cats Protection's guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing



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FIV / FeLV confirmatory blood tests

When to confirm screen test FIV/FeLV results

Unless the cat is showing characteristic signs of FeLV or FIV, or is a feral cat over 8 weeks old, all positive screening test results for FIV/FeLV should be confirmed at a reliable external laboratory. We currently recommend using University of Glasgow Veterinary Diagnostic Services for FeLV in all cats (VI test) and Bristol laboratory for FIV in all cats (PCR test).

If a screening test is negative but the vet is suspicious of the result, confirmation should be sought as described above.

Recommended FIV/FeLV confirmatory blood tests at external laboratories

- Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test – the PCR test looks for genetic material and is especially useful in kittens born of FIV positive queens
- Virus isolation (VI) – A VI test grows the FeLV virus, to identify whether it is present

Details of confirmatory laboratories

Submission forms and further details can be found on the following websites:

University of Glasgow	http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/vet/cad
University of Bristol	A discounted test for CP cats can be submitted on the form found at https://www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-products-and-discount-schemes

FIV testing

Adult cats

Screening test kits detect FIV antibodies which develop four to six weeks after infection. For adult cats which test positive for FIV on a screening test, the guidance is to then send the blood (EDTA sample) to the University of Bristol's Langford Veterinary Diagnostics for confirmation by PCR.

IFA (immunofluorescence assay) is not recommended for Cats Protection's cats. If it has been undertaken in Cats Protection's cats and has yielded inconclusive results, then a PCR test at Bristol's Langford Veterinary Diagnostics is recommended.

Kittens

Kittens born to an FIV-positive mother can have maternal FIV antibodies until they are five to six months old, meaning if they were tested younger than six months of age using a screening test, it is likely that they would show positive results. Because the PCR test looks for actual genetic material, it is very useful in the diagnosis of infection in young kittens which may have maternally-derived antibodies, but which do not actually have FIV. For kittens that test positive on a screening test, a blood sample (EDTA) should be sent to the University of Bristol Laboratory for confirmation with a PCR test.

FeLV testing

Unlike tests for FIV, FeLV tests are not affected by maternally-derived antibodies, so they can be used for cats of any age.

Screening test kits detect free FeLV antigen found in the cat's plasma. If a healthy cat or kitten tests positive for FeLV on a screening test, the guidance is to then send the blood to the University of Glasgow Laboratory for confirmation by VI. Please send blood in both EDTA and heparin tubes.

A PCR test for FeLV is available at some laboratories. PCR results must be interpreted with care because the PCR test detects FeLV genetic material and this may still be present in cats which have been transiently (briefly) infected with FeLV and then go on to recover, and so it can be difficult to interpret positive FeLV PCR results.

More information on FIV/FeLV, including blood testing recommendations can be found on The Cat Group's website: www.thecatgroup.org.uk

Cats Protection's FIV owner handouts

Handout One

For owners taking on a kitten initially testing FIV antibody positive and subsequently testing FIV DNA negative on a confirmatory test.

Testing for FIV in kittens can be complicated. Veterinary practice screening test kits detect antibodies to FIV, so a positive result means that antibodies to FIV have been detected. In adult cats this positive antibody result means that the cat is infected with the FIV virus. However, in kittens this may only mean that they have some of their infected mother's antibodies from the milk, but not the virus itself. In fact, only around one third of kittens born of FIV positive mothers are FIV positive themselves. Therefore a Cats Protection kitten testing positive (for antibodies) on a screening test kit has a special (PCR) test done at a reliable external laboratory to identify whether there is any actual virus present or not.

This kitten tested positive on a screening test, but negative on the PCR test. This indicates that the kitten did have antibodies, likely from its (FIV positive) mother passed over in the milk, but is considered to be FIV negative itself.

Should you or your vet require further information on FIV diagnostic testing, please see the Cats Protection Veterinary Guide section on 'FIV and FeLV testing of cats in CP care', or alternatively please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary Department via veterinary@cats.org.uk.

Cats Protection's FIV owner handouts

Handout Two

For owners taking on a kitten from an FIV positive mother when the kitten has tested FIV antibody negative

This kitten's mother was FIV positive. Fortunately only one third of kittens born to FIV positive queens are FIV positive themselves. This kitten has tested negative on a veterinary practice screening test.

Should you or your vet require further information on FIV diagnostic testing, please see the Cats Protection Veterinary Guide section on 'FIV and FeLV testing of cats in CP care', or alternatively please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary Department via veterinary@cats.org.uk.