

The Inclusion of Cat Dens in a Population of Shelter Cats and Their Effect on URI and LOS



Study Objectives



To determine whether providing shelter cats with enrichment via a consistent hiding den reduced their incidence of upper respiratory infection (URI) and time to adoption.

Methods



746 shelter cats were randomly assigned to either a den or no den cohort.

All cats received standard of care and were monitored daily from intake to outcome.



URI incidence and length of stay (LOS) were analyzed using statistical models, including mediation analysis.

Key Findings

33.7% Cats with dens had a **33.7%** lower incidence of URI than those without dens.

27.2% Cats with URI were **27.2%** less likely to be adopted at any given time when compared to cats without URI, regardless of den presence.

Conclusions

Including cat dens in shelter enclosures can significantly lower URI risk, which leads to shorter LOS. This suggests a simple, effective welfare improvement for shelter cats.

The impact of cat dens on LOS was mediated by reduced URI risk.

The costs of providing a den to every cat entering a shelter may be offset by savings associated with a decline in URI treatment and shorter LOS.