



Pets

Pets & the H1N1 Strain of Influenza Virus

The H1N1 virus, also known as swine flu, has been confirmed in pigs and other animals in the United States, including a handful of cases in which pets caught the bug from their owners. There have been no reports of a person catching the H1N1 virus from a pet.

The person-to-pet transmission of H1N1 flu so far has been limited to a few ferrets and a cat. Pets that live indoors, especially cats, tend to have close contact with their owners, which increases their chances of being exposed to diseases.

To limit the spread of flu, pet owners should wash their hands frequently with soap and water and cover coughs and sneezes with their elbow rather than their hands. Family members who are feeling ill should limit their contact with their pets and other family members until 24 hours after their fever has subsided. Pet owners should consult a veterinarian if their pet is showing any signs of illness.

Although currently no H1N1 vaccine is available for pets, keeping your pets healthy by feeding them a proper diet, scheduling regular visits to a veterinarian, and making sure other immunizations are up-to-date reduces their risk of becoming ill from the H1N1 virus.

The first cases of pets catching the flu were discovered in October and November. A U.S. Department of Agriculture laboratory confirmed the H1N1 virus in several ferrets owned by Oregon residents. The animals became ill with the flu, but all recovered from their infections.

A ferret owned by a Nebraska resident also came up positive for H1N1. This ferret died, apparently from the H1N1 infection. Ferrets are much more susceptible to human influenza viruses than dogs and cats, so these cases were not surprising.

On Nov. 4, Iowa state officials confirmed that a pet cat caught the H1N1 flu shortly after its owners came down with the same illness. The cat fully recovered.

Additional information pertaining to protecting pets can be found on the American Veterinary Medical Association Web site at http://www.avma.org/public_health/influenza/new_virus/default.asp. A fact sheet for pet owners is located at http://www.avma.org/public_health/influenza/new_virus/new_flu_virus_faq_pet_owners.asp. A fact sheet for veterinarians is located at http://www.avma.org/public_health/influenza/new_virus/new_flu_virus_faq_veterinarians.asp.