



The Truth about the FLU and your pets

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The Flu season is upon us and many families have been or will be affected by the flu this year. Health officials are scrambling to get vaccinations available to children, the elderly and hospitals for the new H1N1 influenza virus referred to as "Swine Flu." But with all of the fervor, one vulnerable family member may have been overlooked, the house hold pet.

The Virus: Pandemic H1N1 influenza is a new strain of type A influenza virus originating from two influenza genes, one from pigs and the other from birds. The first human cases surfaced in Mexico last spring and quickly spread around the world causing global concern and even panic.

Pigs and ferrets are particularly susceptible to the flu and several cases of flu transmission in both species have been reported in recent months. In Portland and Roseburg Oregon, ferrets have become ill after exposure to people sick and infected with the H1N1 flu strain and one became sick and died in Nebraska with the disease. Pigs at the Minnesota State fair in October tested positive with human transmission being suspected. In Chile, turkeys have tested positive with the virus. As of yet no pet birds have been reported positive with the H1N1 strain. But because this strain is a recombination of viral genes from avian flu, pet birds are considered at risk. It seems that dogs and cats are not good reservoir for this particular stain of flu virus as infection does not spread easily between animals. There have been nearly 25,000 human cases in the United States alone of laboratory confirmed H1N1 since May 2009 and so far no cases of influenza of any kind in pets have been reported to move from animals to humans, including bird flu.

In early November, the Iowa Department of Public Health verified a case of swine flu H1N1 effecting a 13 year old domestic shorthaired cat. It is the first case of this flu strain crossing species between humans and common household pets to date. The cat presented with flu like respiratory symptoms, not eating and malaise. Several of the family members in the household had flu like symptoms which prompted the veterinarian to submit testing for H1N1. The cat has since made a complete recovery with supportive care. At present it seems that this may have been a unique transmission as no other cases have been reported in either cats or dogs.

Dogs have their own strain of influenza called H3N8. It is a novel virus first discovered in 2004 causing primarily respiratory symptoms of sneezing and a cough. Unlike human influenza, the

canine form occurs all year long and is particularly prevalent in places where there is a high turnover of dogs like shelters and kennels but grooming parlors, day care facilities and veterinary clinics also pose a risk. Other species are not susceptible to this flu strain. Most dogs recover from “kennel cough” like symptoms but secondary pneumonia from bacterial infection can be fatal.

Prevention: Although it appears that “Fluffy” and “Fido” are not at great risk for transmission of the H1N1 flu strain, being immune compromised or elderly may increase risk. It is best to use the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) guidelines around pets when you are sick. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol based cleaners. Cover your coughs and sneezes and try to avoid close contact with your furry friends for at least 24 hours past symptoms until you are well. If you have pet ferrets, pot bellied pigs or pet birds take extra precaution and watch for flu like symptoms of fever, coughing or sneezing, not eating or malaise. If any of these occur, contact your veterinarian immediately, especially if you or a family member is sick.

There is no vaccination approved for animals to the H1N1 flu strain at this time but vaccination for canine influenza H3N8 is available. Your veterinarian can help with information to see if your dog should receive this vaccination. With a little precaution, good hygiene and sanitation your whole family - including your pets - can reduce the risk of illness during this year’s influenza season. Pet lovers can relax, but stay informed and report suspected illnesses for diagnosis and testing.

For more information, contact [Bend Veterinary Clinic](#) at (541) 382-0741.