

## Influenza Infection in Cats

Influenza, or flu, is a highly contagious viral infection that can infect both people and animals. Although there is no strain of influenza specific to cats, two strains of flu have been found in wild and domestic cats and there may be others.

### What kind of flu could my cat have?

The two types of influenza viruses that have been found to infect cats are

- Highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5N1) which has been reported in Africa, Asia and Europe has been linked to consumption of infected birds and
- 2009 novel H1N1 which was confirmed in a single cat from Iowa in November 2009. This 13-year-old indoor cat was diagnosed with H1N1 after developing signs of respiratory infection. The reason for suspicion was that two out of the three household members reported recent influenza-like illnesses.

### How common is influenza among cats?

Reported influenza infections in cats are rare. Other animals such as ferrets or pigs are more susceptible to influenza viruses.

### How are influenza viruses transmitted to cats?

Influenza viruses are typically transmitted through large infectious droplets from a cough or a sneeze. This is most likely how cats or other animals are exposed to the virus.

However transmission of H5N1 avian influenza from birds to cats is through consumption of infected birds or contact with infected bird droppings. To date, the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain found initially in Asia has not yet been found in wild or domestic birds within the United States. It is not known whether other influenza viruses can be transmitted to cats this way.

### What are the signs of flu in cats?

Cats experimentally infected with influenza can have signs similar to people including fever, listlessness, difficulty breathing, conjunctivitis (i.e., swelling and redness of the membranes around the eyes) and occasionally death. These signs can be encountered in cats with other diseases, so contact your veterinarian if you have concerns about your pet.

### Can I get the flu from my cat?

Transmission of influenza viruses from dogs or cats to people has not been documented. People are more likely to get the flu from another person than from a pet.

### Can my other pets get the flu?

Novel H1N1 has been reported in two pet ferrets. The infection has not yet been identified in dogs.

### What should I do if I think my cat has the flu?

If your cat has difficulty breathing you should contact your veterinarian and if you or someone in your household has recently been ill with an influenza-like illness let your veterinarian know that as well.

### How can I prevent my cat from getting novel H1N1?

To prevent transmission of novel H1N1 influenza to your pets:

- Cover your cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands frequently
- If you are feeling ill and have flu-like symptoms, avoid close contact with your pets such as nose to nose contact.

### Is there a vaccine for cats like there is in people?

At this time there is no flu vaccine for cats.

### Additional Resources

American Veterinary Medical Association  
[http://www.avma.org/public\\_health/influenza](http://www.avma.org/public_health/influenza)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm#f>

Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine  
<http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/news/influenza.htm>

For clarification of information presented on this fact sheet  
e-mail [CAHFS@umn.edu](mailto:CAHFS@umn.edu). Updated: 11/06/09