



H1N1 AND YOUR PET

Can my pet get the 2009 H1N1 virus?

It is very uncommon for flu viruses to jump between species, however, on October 9, 2009, a USDA laboratory confirmed 2009/H1N1 infection in a ferret. The ferret's owner had recently had the flu. Ferrets are more susceptible to infection with influenza viruses, so this was not altogether surprising. At this time, there are no reports of the 2009 H1N1 flu virus being transmitted from a ferret to a person.

On November 4, the Iowa Department of Public Health announced that a pet cat was confirmed to be infected with the 2009 H1N1 flu virus. The cat became sick after its owners had the flu. The cat and its owners have recovered, and there is no evidence at this time that the cat passed the virus to any people.

How can I protect my pet from the 2009 H1N1 virus?

Pets that live indoors, especially cats, tend to have close contact with their owners, which increases the pet's exposure to diseases. Always follow common sense guidelines when dealing with animals. If you are sick, cover your cough and sneeze, minimize contact with your pet, and wash your hands frequently with soap and water before and after handling your pet. Also, keep a good eye on your pet's health and contact your veterinarian if your pet shows any signs of illness.

Since H1N1 has been found in ferrets and cats, do I need to get rid of my ferret or cat so my family is protected?

No. You are much more likely to catch the flu (any type of flu, including the 2009 H1N1 flu) from an infected person than you are from an animal. So far, all of the pets infected with the 2009 H1N1 virus became infected from being around their ill owners. If you have flu-like symptoms such as a fever, cough, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache or tiredness, limit your contact with your pets until you are feeling better. If your pet shows signs of illness, contact your veterinarian.

Can my pot-bellied pig get the 2009 H1N1 virus and give it to me?

To date, the 2009 H1N1 virus has not been reported in pot-bellied pigs. However, because the virus can be passed from humans to pigs, pig owners should be careful. Pot-bellied pigs are considered swine, and therefore may be susceptible to the H1N1 virus. Keep your pig away from people who are sick or have recently been around someone who is sick. If you have a pet pig that shows signs of illness, contact your veterinarian immediately.

There are feral pigs in my area. Can they spread the 2009 H1N1 virus?

To date, the 2009 H1N1 virus has not been reported in feral pigs. However, pigs can become infected with the virus, and caution is recommended. Remember that feral pigs can spread other diseases, and it is best for people and animals to avoid contact with feral pigs.

Can the 2009 H1N1 flu infect birds? Can I get it from birds?

Yes, H1N1 can infect birds. In August 2009, authorities in Chile reported 2009 H1N1 influenza in two turkey farms. In October 2009, Canadian officials confirmed 2009 H1N1 in a turkey flock. It is not yet known if infected birds can pass the 2009 H1N1 virus to humans.

If my pet needs antiviral medication, will my veterinarian be able to get some?

The 2009 H1N1 virus is spreading mainly through person-to-person contact. Because we are in a global pandemic, priority must be given to treating infected people. There may be limited availability of antiviral medications for non-pandemic response use. Veterinarians are encouraged by federal authorities to use their best clinical judgment and weigh all these factors when considering the necessity of giving antiviral medication to pets.