

First Cat Tests Positive For H1N1 Flu

H1N1 flu was confirmed for the first time in a pet cat and has also been found in pigs, birds and ferrets.

By The SmallAnimalChannel News Division

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Ferrets are one of the animals that is susceptible to influenza.

Iowa state officials confirmed November 4 that a cat has tested positive for the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus. This is the first time a cat has been diagnosed with this strain of influenza. Up until this point, H1N1 had only been found in humans, pigs, birds and ferrets.

The 13-year-old indoor cat in Iowa was brought to the Lloyd Veterinary Medical Center at Iowa State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, where it tested positive for the H1N1 virus.

"Two of the three members of the family that owns the pet had suffered from influenza-like illness before the cat become ill," said Ann Garvey, DVM, public health veterinarian at the Iowa Department of Public Health. "This is not completely unexpected, as other strains of influenza have been found in cats in the past."

Both the cat and its owners have recovered from their illnesses.

The diagnosis was in collaboration of the Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine, Center for Advanced Host Defenses, Immunobiotics and Translational Comparative Medicine, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Animal Industry Bureau.

However, this is not the only recent H1N1 first. On October 19, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratories confirmed the presence of the virus in a pig sample collected at the Minnesota State Fair. This was the first confirmed case in the U.S. swine population. Previously, the virus had been reported in pigs in Canada, Argentina, Singapore, the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), Ireland, Norway and Japan.

Shortly after, the National Veterinary Services Laboratory confirmed five more pigs from Minnesota and South Dakota as having the H1N1 virus. The laboratory received 57 samples from pigs at the Minnesota State Fair, as well as 45 samples from pigs at the South Dakota State Fair. At press time, testing continued on six additional samples that had preliminary H1N1 positive results.

The samples collected at both fairs were part of a University of Iowa and University of Minnesota cooperative agreement research project funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which documents influenza viruses where humans and pigs interact, such as fairs.

The USDA reminds U.S. swine producers about the need for good hygiene and biosecurity measures and encourages them to participate in USDA's swine influenza virus surveillance program. Consumers are also reminded that they cannot catch the influenza virus from eating pork.

The USDA is maintaining a list of all 2009 pandemic H1N1 influenza detections in swine at its website.

In related news, the Oregon Veterinary Medical Association reported that a ferret in Oregon recently tested positive for H1N1. The ferret had been brought to a Portland veterinary hospital because it had been exhibiting weakness followed by sneezing, coughing and an elevated temperature.

After learning that the client and her children previously had symptoms compatible with influenza, the clinic decided to test the ferret's nasal secretions for influenza. The virus was confirmed at the National Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory on October 9. This was the first confirmed case of 2009 H1N1 infection in a ferret. It is believed that the human owner transmitted the virus to her ferret.

A television station in Nebraska reported that a family's four ferrets became ill after the family members were ill with the virus. After one ferret died, preliminary tests were positive for H1N1. Confirmatory tests are still pending.



However, the American Veterinary Medical Association points out that the news story incorrectly reported two known ferret deaths from H1N1. To date, the Nebraska ferret is the only confirmed H1N1-infected ferret death. The Oregon ferret infected with the H1N1 virus is recovering, according to the Oregon State Veterinarian and the Oregon State Veterinary Medical Association.

The Oregon Veterinary Medical Association warns that ferret owners should be cautious as this year's flu season gets underway. Ferrets are generally susceptible to influenza A viruses under which H1N1 is classified.

The AVMA urges pet owners to monitor their pets' health very closely, no matter what type of animal, and visit a veterinarian if there are any signs of illness.

The H1N1 symptoms in people are very similar to human respiratory flu, and may also cause gastrointestinal side effects such as diarrhea and vomiting, according to the AVMA. In severe cases, pneumonia can occur. To date, animals infected with H1N1 have shown mild respiratory illness or no illness at all.

The AVMA is tracking all instances of H1N1 in animals and posting updates on its website.

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