

More Ferrets In Oregon Test Positive For H1N1 Flu

Three more ferrets in Oregon tested positive for the H1N1 flu.

By The SmallAnimalChannel News Division

Posted: November 11, 2009, 4:40 p.m. EST

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Four ferrets in Oregon are confirmed to have contracted the H1N1 flu so far.

Oregon state officials confirmed November 11, 2009, that three more ferrets have tested positive for the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus. This brings the total number of H1N1 flu cases affecting ferrets in the state to four, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association.

The ferrets that tested positive for the virus are among a group of nine ferrets that live with a family in the Roseburg area, said Emilio DeBess, DVM, Oregon State Public Health Veterinarian. All nine ferrets exhibited flu-like symptoms, but only three were taken to the veterinarian. Those three ferrets tested positive for H1N1. The other ferrets were not tested, but it is believed they may have had the virus as well. All nine ferrets have recovered.

The family members owning the ferrets were reportedly sick with flu-like symptoms the week prior to the animals becoming ill, according to DeBess. There are no indications that the ferrets passed the virus on to people or any other species of animal, he added.

The first ferret in Oregon confirmed with the virus was diagnosed in early October. All of the sick ferrets have recovered. One ferret in Nebraska that had been confirmed with the virus has died.

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.

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The OVMA encourages ferret owners to contact their veterinarian if their pet starts to exhibit signs of respiratory illness or lethargy. Because of the immunosuppressive effects of influenza, bacterial infection may be of concern. If discharge from the nose or eyes becomes discolored (yellow or green), or if the ferret is coughing, the OVMA suggests contacting a veterinarian.

The 2009 H1N1 influenza virus has also been detected in an Iowa cat, pigs in Minnesota and South Dakota, birds and humans.

Pet owners should take precautions to help reduce the spread of influenza between themselves and their pets, DeBess told the AVMA.

"The key message is to protect your animals much like you protect your family," he said. "Wash your hands, cover your cough and your sneeze, and do your best to prevent contaminating objects your pet may come into contact with."

Although it is believed that it was the human owners that transmitted the virus to their ferrets and cat, DeBess cautions owners and veterinarians that it may be possible for ferrets or cats to transmit the H1N1 flu virus to humans. Coughing and sneezing can spread the virus, which can remain infectious for about a week outside the body, he said. Pet owners and veterinarians should thoroughly wash their hands when handling sick pets or when they are sick themselves, he added.

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 flu 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 flu in animals and posting updates on its website.

The OVMA is also posting updated information on H1N1 flu on its website as it becomes available.

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