



FieldHaven Feline Center

"For Every Cat in Need, a Solution"

Avian Influenza Type A (H5N1) in Cats

Last Updated: December 29, 2024

What We Know

The Avian Influenza Type A (H5N1) virus is also known as the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) virus. There has been a current outbreak in December 2024.

Case 1

Eight cats were fed raw milk that was subsequently recalled because of H5N1 flu contamination (because the milk came from an infected dairy and was not pasteurized). Seven of the cats got sick and five of them died. The other two are being isolated while they recover.

Case 2

Five cats got sick after eating two different types of raw pet food, which contained poultry and beef. Both of these types of meat are potential flu sources if fed raw (because both chickens and cattle can be infected). Two of those cats were presented to a veterinary clinic in respiratory distress and were euthanized. Two other cats showed signs of lethargy, anorexia, neurological, respiratory and ocular disease. One of these cats was tested and was positive for H5N1 influenza.

Case 3

20 wild cats at the Wild Felid Advocacy Center in Washington became ill and subsequently died. Animal health officials confirmed the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

What are the clinical signs?

Clinical signs can begin as mild symptoms and then quickly progress to severe signs.

- Loss of appetite, lethargy, fever
- Neurologic signs, such as ataxia (incoordination), circling, tremors, seizures, or blindness
- Severe depression
- Copious discharge from the eyes and nose
- Other respiratory signs, including rapid respiratory rate, difficulty breathing, and possibly sneezing or coughing
- Sudden death

What are the risk factors?

Risk factors for exposure to avian influenza type A (H5N1) may include:

- Contact with sick or deceased cats and wild birds, backyard flocks, or poultry farms
- Contact with dairy farms or backyard dairy producers
- Consumption of raw meat or dairy products
- Known exposure to other animals or people infected with avian influenza type A (H5N1)

How do I prevent my cats from getting this disease?

- Refrain from feeding cats any dairy products that have not first been pasteurized.
- Thoroughly cook meat before feeding.
- Keep cats indoors to prevent exposure to birds and other wildlife.
- Avoid contact with sick or dead birds.
- Keep cats away from livestock, poultry, and their environments, especially in areas with known H5N1 outbreaks.
- Take steps to prevent contact between captive big cats and wild birds in areas where H5N1 is circulating.
- Thoroughly wash your hands after handling your cat and after any encounters with poultry, livestock, or wild birds.
- Change your clothes and shoes, and thoroughly wash any exposed skin, after interacting with sick or dead animals that may harbor the H5N1 virus.
- Limit their cat's contact with immunocompromised individuals if any exposure to the virus is possible.
- Protect themselves and others from influenza by following CDC recommendations.
- Monitor their family and other animals that might have been exposed for signs of illness.
- Immediately contact your veterinarian if you notice signs of H5N1 or think your cat might have been exposed to the virus.

No cases of transmission between humans and cats have been reported in the current national outbreak. Influenza A (H5N1) virus is considered low risk to the public, but risk is greater for those who handle and care for infected animals.

If you suspect your cat may have Avian Influenza type A (H5N1), contact your veterinarian before taking them in.

Resources

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html>

Worms and Germs Blog:

<https://www.wormsandgermsblog.com/2024/12/articles/animals/cats/h5n1-flu-in-cats-in-california-an-update/>

<https://wildfelids.org/>

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AVMA:

https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/cvm-updates/fda-outlines-ways-reduce-risk-hpai-cats?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

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