



DEVAL L. PATRICK
Governor

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
Lieutenant Governor

JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.
Secretary

JOHN AUERBACH
Commissioner

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619

Tel.: 617-624-5200
Fax: 617-624-5206

November 17, 2009

Frequently Asked Questions about Animals and Flu

Can animals get the flu?

Yes. There are different types of flu viruses (called strains) and many of them can infect animals. Only a few strains infect humans. Animals and humans usually do not get the same types of flu.

What kinds of animals have their own flu?

Poultry (chickens, ducks and turkeys), pigs, horses and dogs each have at least one strain of their own flu in the United States. Poultry have the largest number of strains of virus that can infect them. Pig herds in the U.S. have 3 strains that commonly infect them. Horses and dogs each have their own strain that infects them. There are vaccines (shots) available for all these animals to protect them from their own kind of flu.

Do any animals get human flu?

Yes. It has been known for many years that pigs can sometimes get sick from human strains of flu and that humans can sometimes get sick with pig strains of flu. This is because some of the cells inside the respiratory systems of pigs and humans are similar. Ferrets are also known to become sick with human flu. In fact, ferrets are often used to study human strains of flu because they catch flu viruses very easily.

What about animals and H1N1 flu?

Although H1N1 flu is a human strain of influenza virus, there have been a few species of animals that have become infected with it. Pigs in the U.S., Canada and several other countries throughout the world have gotten infected with the human H1N1 strain of flu. Turkey flocks have also gotten infected with the same human H1N1 strain.

Most recently, H1N1 has also been diagnosed in ferrets and a cat. The owners of all animals were sick with flu and were only able to spread the disease to their pet through close contact.

At this time there is no evidence that the animals spread the virus back to people.

How likely is it that my pet will get the H1N1 flu?

Cases of H1N1 infection in pets appear to be extremely rare. All cases occurred in indoor pets whose family members were sick with flu first.

How do I know if my pet has H1N1 flu?

Remember that your pet can't get H1N1 flu unless it has been exposed to a person with the disease. Signs of influenza virus infection in animals are similar to those in people. The animal may be lethargic, have a decreased appetite, a fever, runny eyes, and sneezing or coughing. If you are concerned about any illness in your pet you should contact your veterinarian.

Can I get my pet tested for H1N1 flu?

There are a few laboratories that can provide testing services for a fee if your veterinarian believes it is necessary. However, since there is no specific treatment for flu in animals, it may not be medically important to have the testing done.

Can my pet be treated for H1N1 flu?

The drugs that a doctor can give people to treat flu are not licensed for use in animals. This means that nobody knows if they would be safe or effective in animals.

How can I protect my pet from getting H1N1 flu?

There are no specific guidelines available about how to protect your pet from the flu. However, some of the things you do to protect yourself may also protect your pet.

- Get yourself and your family vaccinated when flu vaccine is available. If you don't get infected with the flu, you cannot spread it.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the inside of your elbow.
- Use a household cleaner to clean things that are touched often.
- If you have the flu, consider having another person in the household care for the pet.

Can my pet be vaccinated against H1N1?

No. There are no vaccines (shots) against the human H1N1 flu strain available for use in any species of animal.

Can my pet give me H1N1 flu?

H1N1 flu is a human flu strain and it is spread between people. Even though there have been a few cases of animals catching H1N1 flu from people, these animals have not given it back to people.

What if I keep pigs or poultry?

People who work at pig or poultry farms are especially advised to avoid contact with the animals while they are sick. If the person passes flu to the animals it might affect the whole group.

For pigs and poultry kept in smaller backyard groups, consider finding another person to care for the animals while you are sick.