

H5N1 Avian Influenza and Your Cat

Disclaimer: We are not veterinarians or able to provide medical advice. The sites here are supports, resources, and possible research articles that have valuable information. We strongly suggest that these be utilized along with the support of your purrsonal veterinarian. Any medical advice in regards to the care of your cat must come from a medical professional.

From the: Cornell Feline Health Center

Supporting Cat Health with Information and Health Studies

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian influenza is an influenza type A virus that occurs naturally in wild aquatic birds, including ducks, geese and gulls. Mild forms of avian influenza (known as low pathogenic avian influenza, or LPAI) are routinely found in wild birds and don't cause serious illness.

From time to time, a mild strain changes through mutation or mixing with other flu viruses into a more severe type of the virus (highly pathogenic avian influenza, or HPAI). HPAI historically has caused 75-100% mortality in poultry, like chickens and turkeys, as well as some wild birds.

The current outbreak of HPAI has spread into dairy cattle, domestic cats, many species of wildlife and also a small number of people.

Can cats catch It?

Cats are susceptible to H5N1 infection.

Are H5N1 infections in cats serious?

H5N1 can cause serious, even life-threatening illness in cats. Up to 70% of infected cats die of their infections.

What are the symptoms of H5N1 in cats?

Infected cats often develop a fever, loss of appetite, and lethargy early in their infections; and signs can worsen rapidly to include nasal/ocular discharge, sneezing, coughing, respiratory difficulty, and neurologic signs such as incoordination, tremors, seizures, and blindness.

Where do cats get H5N1 infections from?

Suspected or verified sources of feline infections include ingesting raw (unpasteurized) cow's milk, raw meat/poultry products, exposure to infected livestock/poultry and their environments, exposure to wild birds, and exposure to infected people and their clothing.

Can an infected cat pass an H5N1 infection to a person?

While this is theoretically possible, we are not aware of any cases of cat-to-human transmission of H5N1 during the current outbreak. Out of an abundance of caution, though, any cat showing signs of H5N1 infection should not be allowed to lick anyone's face or interact closely with people until veterinary consultation has been carried out.

Can an infected cat pass an H5N1 infection to another cat?

While this is theoretically possible, we are not aware of any cases of cat-to-cat transmission of H5N1 during the current outbreak. Out of an abundance of caution, though, any cat showing signs of H5N1 infection should be isolated from other cats until veterinary consultation has been carried out.

Can an infected person pass an H5N1 infection to a cat?

While human-to-cat transmission of H5N1 has not been definitively identified during the current outbreak, the possibility exists. This notion was raised, in particular, by a recent report of H5N1 infections in two indoor-only cats that lived with people who worked on dairy farms in a region of Michigan in which H5N1 has been shown to be circulating among dairy farms. Importantly, these workers declined viral testing in both cases, so it is not definitively known whether they were infected and could have served as sources of infection for these cats, but this is possible. Another possibility is that these cats could have become infected via contact with the clothing of these workers rather than via direct transmission from person to cat, but an abundance of caution dictates that we assume that this mode of transmission, while apparently rare thus far, is possible.

You can read the [original report here](#).

How can I protect my cat from H5N1 infection?

Refrain from feeding raw (even freeze-dried raw) meat-based foods and treats and unpasteurized dairy products. Keep him/her indoors and away from livestock, poultry, and their environments, and from sick or dead birds. Thoroughly wash your hands and change clothing (including footwear) after interacting with any livestock, poultry, wild bird, other animals, or bird feeders. Isolate any cats or people showing signs of infection from other cats/animals. Unfortunately, there is currently no vaccine available for H5N1.

What should I do if I observe signs of H5N1 infection in my cat?

Isolate the cat from other pets and people, thoroughly wash your hands before and after interacting with the cat and call your veterinarian immediately. Importantly, do not bring your cat to a veterinarian before contacting them so that they can take appropriate precautions to protect your cat, other patients, and the whole veterinary team.

[Avian Influenza \(Bird Flu\) Fact Sheet](#)

[Avian Influenza and your cat](#)

All of the information above comes from the Cornell Feline Health Center. Please visit the links for more information about the Avian Flu and the impact it could potentially have on you and your cat(s).