

Avian Influenza A (H5N1) in Cats

How do cats become infected?

- Feeding of raw or undercooked meat, specifically poultry-based diets, including chicken, turkey and duck, as all poultry are highly susceptible to H5N1 influenza
- Raw colostrum and other unpasteurized dairy products (like cream)
- Contact with infected wild birds or poultry
- Exposure to infected livestock and their environments
- Contact with people who work on affected farms

What are the clinical signs of H5N1 in cats?

Illness may start with non-specific signs such as decreased appetite, lethargy, or fever, then quickly progress to:

- Neurologic signs (e.g., ataxia [incoordination], circling, tremors, seizures, or blindness)
- Severe depression
- Heavy discharge from the nose and eyes
- Other respiratory signs, including rapid or difficulty breathing, and possibly sneezing or coughing

What should cat owners do if H5N1 is suspected?

- Call your veterinary clinic even if you aren't sure that they might have H5N1 and describe any clinical signs you have noticed so that the veterinary team can be

ready before your cat arrives

- Limit your cat's contact with immuno-compromised people
- Protect yourself and others from influenza by following recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [see QR code below]
- Report any human illness to your local public health official

How can H5N1 infection be prevented in cats?

No vaccine is available yet to protect cats against H5N1. Cat owners and caretakers can help keep their cats safe by following these tips:

- Avoid feeding cats any unpasteurized or uncooked dairy products
- Thoroughly cook meat before feeding and avoid feeding raw meat-based treats or diets
- Keep cats indoors to prevent exposure to birds and other wildlife
- Avoid contact with sick or dead birds and other wildlife yourself
- Keep cats away from livestock, poultry, and their environments, especially in areas with known H5N1 outbreaks
- Thoroughly wash your hands after handling your cat and after any encounters with poultry, livestock, or wild birds and other animals
- Change your clothes and shoes, and thoroughly wash any exposed

skin, after interacting with sick or dead animals that may harbor the H5N1 virus

- If you feed birds or walk near bird feeders or other places birds (including poultry) gather, change your shoes or disinfect their soles before entering your house
- Immediately contact your veterinarian if you notice signs of H5N1 or think your cat might have been exposed to the virus

What if I have a dog, are they at risk?

Dogs may be less susceptible to H5N1 influenza than cats, but they are still susceptible, and infections in dogs have been reported, therefore the same preventative concepts apply to both species.

Additional Resources



CatFriendly.com



CDC.gov



AVMA.org



faithfulfriends
vc.com/cats