

## Could Your Cat Catch the H1N1 Virus?

**CatChannel Managing Editor Nikki Batalis blogs about ways to lessen the fear of the influenza strain by using a little common sense.**

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My cat Hey Jude, safe in my arms. The cat world was a bit alarmed about the news that broke Wednesday: A 13-year-old Iowa housecat was confirmed as having the H1N1 virus. It was the first diagnosis of the influenza strain in a feline. Up to now, it had only been found in humans, pigs, birds and ferrets.

Two of the three humans in the Iowa cat's house had "influenza-like illness." The cat, a 16-pound orange tabby, almost certainly caught the virus from his human family members, the health experts say.

Everyone I know is taking strong measures against the flu this year, either by getting the vaccine, or washing their hands more frequently, or wiping down shopping cart handles. Or all of the above.

In my house, my husband has stationed pump bottles of hand sanitizer all over the place: the kitchen counter, by the TV remote control, next to the computer — anywhere that our three sons will be likely to see and use it. It's our hope that this will decrease all of our chances of getting ill.

By taking the common-sense precautions we all have heard about, we can lessen the chances of spreading illness to family members, including the furry ones.

Remember to: Wash your hands often. It might be a good idea to wash before you pet your cat, as well as after. Cover your coughs and sneezes, even if it's just you and your kitties in the room. Avoid contact with those who are ill.

Reports are that the Iowa kitty has recovered from the flu just fine. But the American Veterinary Medical Association urges you to keep an eye on your cat, particularly if you or a family member has the flu. Call your vet if you see any of these symptoms: Trouble breathing, Loss of appetite, Lethargy

Let me know of any special measures you are taking to keep your cat healthy.

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