

Swine Flu No Risk to Cats, Expert Says

UC Davis professor says the flu strain hasn't been shown to spread to pets.

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The H1N1 influenza viruses, or swine flu, have never been shown to transmit to dogs and cats, says Sharon Hietala, an expert in infectious diseases in animals. Cats and dogs do not appear to be at risk from becoming infected with the swine flu virus that's in the news for making 91 people sick in the United States as of Wednesday.

Sharon Hietala, a professor at the California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory System, headquartered at University of California, Davis, said that the H1N1 influenza viruses "have never been shown to transmit to dogs and cats."

Hietala, an expert in clinical immunology and diagnostic techniques for infectious diseases in animals, added that at this point, humans only need to be concerned about protecting themselves from the swine flu, but there's no need to worry about their pets becoming ill.

"The novel H1N1 influenza virus in the news right now is being transmitted from human to human; there have been no findings of this virus in any animals," Hietala said. "Pig populations often have H1N1 influenza viruses, but not the particular novel H1N1 flu strain that is currently in the news."

The health concerns, therefore, are for influenza transmission from other people. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers the following suggestions on what people can do to avoid influenza virus transmission between people: Use tissue to cover coughs and sneezes. Throw the tissue in the trash after use. Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. Avoid touching the eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way. Try to avoid close contact with sick people. If you get sick with influenza, CDC recommends that people stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.