

Can Cats and Dogs Catch H1N1 Virus?

Vet experts say the virus hasn't been shown to spread to pets

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Pet parents of cats and dogs can relax; there appears to be little risk of the H1N1 virus, sometimes erroneously referred to as "swine flu," infecting the companion animals, according to ASPCA veterinarians.

"Many species can become infected with influenza viruses, but the 2009 H1N1 virus, which is a mixture of genetic material from different species, has not been identified in animal populations in the United States to date," says Dr. Miranda Spindel, director of ASPCA Veterinary Outreach. "These viruses are notoriously unpredictable, though, and it is important that we remain vigilant."

Concurring is Sharon Hietala, a professor at the California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory System, headquartered at University of California, Davis. She said that the H1N1 virus "has 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 virus, but there's no need to worry about their pets becoming ill.

The ASPCA suggests that pet parents take common-sense preventative measures to keep their cats and dogs healthy: Avoid letting your cat roam freely outside. Don't let your cats share water bowls, food dishes or toys with other animals. Make sure your cat is eating, drinking and playing as he normally does every day. If you notice your pet behaving unusually, check with your veterinarian.