

Oregon Cat With H1N1 Dies

It is the third reported case of a cat with H1N1 and the first reported feline fatality.

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The Oregon State Public Health Veterinarian confirmed that a cat in Oregon has died from presumed 2009 H1N1 influenza virus infection. It's believed that this is the first feline H1N1 fatality and the third case of a cat with the virus, according to the Oregon Veterinary Medical Association. The other two cats from Iowa and Utah have recovered.

The deceased 10-year-old male cat lived with three other cats that also became ill with different degrees of sneezing and coughing. None of them had an elevated temperature. Nasal swab samples were collected and yielded no other positive results for H1N1, according to the OVMA

In these cases, it is believed that the cats caught the virus from humans in their households who were sick with influenza-like symptoms.

However, Emilio DeBess, DVM, Oregon State Public Health Veterinarian, cautions veterinarians and pet owners that it may be possible for cats to transmit the virus to humans. Coughing and sneezing can spread the virus which can remain infectious for about a week outside the body, he said. The OVMA encourages people to thoroughly wash their hands when handling sick pets or when they are sick.

Still, the OVMA said that cat owners should not panic as the number of confirmed cases of H1N1 infection in cats is quite small compared to the U.S. cat population.

Cat owners should watch their pet for symptoms and seek veterinary care if the cat shows signs of respiratory illness. Symptoms include coughing, sneezing, lethargy or conjunctivitis.

The 2009 H1N1 influenza virus has also been detected in ferrets, pigs, birds and humans.

The American Veterinary Medical Association urges pet owners to monitor their pets' health very closely, no matter what type of animal, and visit a veterinarian if there are any signs of illness.

The AVMA is tracking all instances of H1N1 in animals and posting updates on its website.