

## Cats Could Play Role in Bird Flu Spread

**More research is needed, according to a British scientists review.**

Cats might play a key role in the spread of the avian flu virus, according to a report by a British scientist.

Professor Jeffrey Waage of Imperial College London has issued a review of the science supporting the British governments avian flu contingency plans.

The ability of mammals to contract and transmit the avian influenza virus has important human health implications. We know about cats as a potential host for avian influenza because of the extensive infection of cats in Asia in outbreaks there, Waage wrote.

In his review, Waage calls for more research into exposure to the virus by feral cats, farm cats and household pets and the associated risk of transmission to poultry.

Scientists say cats can contract the virus through contact with domestic and wild birds and ooze the virus from their respiratory and digestive tracts.

Two years ago came the first report of a domestic cat dying from the avian influenza virus in Thailand. Then came the death of 147 captive tigers fed virus-infected chicken carcasses and cases in Indonesia, where farmers already linked the disease in cats to that in poultry.

Cats can become infected with the virus through contact with domestic and wild birds, then excrete the virus from the respiratory and digestive tracts, sometimes transmitting infection to other cats.

Cats fed virus-infected chickens can be infected directly through the stomach. Posted: June 14, 2006, 5:00 a.m. EST