



Avian Influenza A: Frequently Asked Questions

Information for Cat Owners:

Since testing began in November 2016, over 100 cats from NYC Animal Care Centers (ACC) have tested positive for avian influenza H7N2. Most cats experienced mild illness and are expected to recover. However, one cat developed severe pneumonia and was humanely euthanized.

The Health Department has been working with the ACC to determine if H7N2 was spread from the cats to anyone who works or volunteers at the Manhattan shelter or who recently adopted a cat from ACC. Only one person has tested positive for the virus: a veterinarian who was working very closely with the sick cats. The veterinarian suffered only mild illness and has completely recovered.

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza (bird flu) is a disease that is caused by a group of influenza viruses. It usually infects water fowl or poultry such as chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys. Sometimes influenza viruses change (mutate), which allows them to infect mammals such as pigs, dogs or people.

What is H7N2?

H7N2 is a type of avian influenza virus.

Are other cats at risk of getting H7N2?

At this time, only the cats in NYC animal shelters have tested positive for H7N2.

What are the signs of H7N2 in cats?

Signs include sneezing, coughing, runny nose and runny or red eyes.

How does H7N2 spread from one cat to another?

Influenza viruses can spread if a cat has contact with another infected cat or with objects (such as kitty litter or food bowls) used by sick animals.

Can I get my cat vaccinated for influenza?

Currently, there is no influenza vaccine for cats.

Are there medicines that can treat the infection in cats?

There are no medicines available to treat influenza in cats. Veterinarians may use other medicines, such as pain relievers, antibiotics or intravenous fluids, to help the cat recover.

Can cats die from H7N2 virus?

Illness is usually mild and most cats recover quickly.

What should I do if I adopted a cat from the ACC shelter and it is sick?

If you adopted the cat from an ACC shelter between November 12 and December 15 and it has respiratory illness, call your veterinarian's office for an appointment. Let them know when you make the appointment that your cat was at risk for H7N2 so that they can make arrangements to prevent exposure to other cats in the clinic.

How can I prevent getting other animals sick?

If there are other cats living in the same house, separate the sick cat from the healthy ones. Keep it indoors, and do not let other animals use the sick cat's food or water bowls, toys or litter box. Wash your hands often with soap and water after touching the cat, cleaning its litter box or crate, or coming into contact with its saliva, urine, feces or blood.

Can H7N2 virus be transmitted to people or other animals?

The risk of transmission of H7N2 from cats to humans is low. People who have flu-like symptoms are likely to have seasonal influenza or other respiratory viruses commonly seen in the winter.

The symptoms of seasonal influenza viruses and H7N2 are similar, and medications that treat seasonal influenza also treat infections due to the H7N2 virus. People with existing health conditions or weakened immune systems, and women who are pregnant are at a higher risk of complications from seasonal influenza, and this may also be true of H7N2.

What can I do to protect myself if my cat is sick?

Do not nuzzle or have close facial contact with cats if they are sick, or if you are pregnant or have any underlying conditions that affect your immune system (such as cancer, diabetes or chronic lung disease).

If I adopted a cat from a NYC shelter, should I get tested?

If you are well, you do not need to get tested. However, if you adopted a cat from an ACC shelter and you develop flu-like symptoms such as cough, fever, sore throat, muscle aches, shortness of breath or conjunctivitis (red eyes) within three weeks of adopting the cat, please contact your health provider. Make sure you tell your doctor that you have recently adopted a cat from an ACC shelter.

If you do not have a primary care provider, call the Health Department at 866-692-3641.

What can I do to stay healthy?

While the risk of a person getting avian influenza is low, seasonal influenza is already spreading in New York City and can lead to serious illness. Get vaccinated.

Where can I get more information?

[Avian Influenza A Virus Infections in Humans](#)

[Transmission of Avian Influenza A Viruses Between Animals and People](#)

[Outbreaks of Avian Influenza in North America](#)

[Influenza/Flu Health Bulletin](#)