

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Virus and Pets

As of 11/10/2009

Information for Veterinarians

Q. What are the clinical signs associated with pandemic H1N1 Influenza virus?

- Confirmed cases in ferrets presented with respiratory disease as well as symptoms much like humans including: coughing, sneezing, fever, and weakness.
- The confirmed feline case presented with respiratory disease, loss of appetite and lethargy.

Q. What do I do if I suspect one of my patients has pandemic H1N1 Influenza virus?

- Encourage the client to confirm through testing and discuss the care of animals with potential zoonotic disease.
- With permission obtain sample for testing (see below).
- Notify the Iowa State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory at (515) 294-1950 if samples are being submitted. See influenza testing information at <http://vetmed.iastate.edu/vdpam/disease-topics/pandemic-h1n1-pets>.
- Encourage owners to clean impervious items such as bowls, toys, etc. with bleach in a 1:10 dilution, and clean rooms exposed in the household with detergent cleaners.

Q. What samples should be submitted for testing?

- Respiratory secretions (e.g. nasal swabs, nasal washings and/or oropharyngeal swabs, lung lavage) and cloacal swabs (in the case of pet birds) have diagnostic utility. Blood, feces, and urine may have diagnostic utility and consult with the diagnostic lab before submission.
- If swabs are submitted, samples should be collected with a synthetic polyester fiber swab (e.g. Dacron*) or flocked swab (e.g. Copan) placed in a viral transporting medium or physiological saline solution (0.5 ml). These will be submitted for viral nucleic acid detection though PCR which is the preferred method of testing for pandemic H1N1 influenza in all species. Virus isolation test is applicable to these samples.
- Samples should be refrigerated until shipped and then shipped overnight ON ICE (not frozen).

Q. Are my employees or myself at risk?

- At this time there are no data that indicate a pet-to-human route of transmission.

Q. What in-clinic precautions should be taken with suspect or confirmed pets?

- Minimize physical contact with infected animals.
- Avoid situations where biting or scratching could occur.
- Wear personal protective equipment to minimize contact with saliva, respiratory secretions, feces and urine.
- Disinfect surfaces frequently and wash hands after handling.

Q. Is hospitalization required for suspect/confirmed positive pets?

- Hospitalization is at the discretion of the attending veterinarian based on the condition of the pet.
- If hospitalization is necessary, isolate from other animals.

Q. What do I do if the test is negative, but the animal remains a high suspect?

- If the PCR or virus isolation is negative and the animal is a strong suspect for pandemic H1N1 Influenza virus, resubmit new respiratory samples for retesting.

Q. What do I do if I receive a deceased pet for pandemic H1N1 Influenza testing?

- If there is a high clinical suspicion due to the owner and animal history, document a complete history and submit the body to the Iowa State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory or your regular diagnostics provider, for a full necropsy and testing.
- Notify the diagnostic laboratory that it is a pandemic H1N1 influenza suspect case.

For more information regarding influenza, see the Center for Food Security and Public Health web site <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/> and specifically their influenza fact sheet. <https://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/influenza.pdf>.