

Deadly Bird Flu: New Risks of Human-Cat Transmission

Description

A recent study released on Thursday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates a troubling possibility: humans may transmit avian influenza to their domestic cats, with potentially lethal outcomes.

This research, featuring two case studies from Michigan in May 2024, is documented in the agency's [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#). As concerns escalate regarding the virus's possible mutation into a strain that could incite a human pandemic, the findings are particularly alarming.

It has recently been revealed that cats can also become infected through pet food tainted with the virus, and that transmission may occur among larger feline species in shelters.

In both case studies, the pet owners were associated with dairy cattle farms affected by an avian flu outbreak, resulting in the tragic deaths of the infected cats. In the first instance, a five-year-old indoor female cat exhibited a rapid decline in appetite, hygiene, disorientation, lethargy, and severe neurological deterioration.

Despite urgent care at the Michigan State University Veterinary Medical Center, her condition deteriorated rapidly, leading to euthanasia just four days later. Postmortem examinations confirmed she had indeed contracted bird flu.

Two additional cats resided in the same household; one displayed mild symptoms, which were mistakenly attributed to allergies, leading the owners to disengage from public health inquiries. Among those living in the household, a farmworker opted out of testing, while an adult and two teenagers received negative results for avian influenza.

Human and cat hugging

The CDC study indicates that humans may transmit bird flu to domestic cats. ([Uschi_Du/Pixabay](#))

Connection to Unpasteurized Milk

Shortly after, a separate case involving a six-month-old male Maine Coon was reported to the university. The cat showcased symptoms such as anorexia, lethargy, facial swelling, and restricted mobility, ultimately succumbing within 24 hours.

This Maine Coon lived alongside another cat that remained unaffected. The owner regularly transported unpasteurized milk from various Michigan farms, including those confirmed to harbor infected dairy cattle.

Without protective gear, the owner reported frequent direct contact with raw milk and often neglected to change contaminated clothing before returning home. Notably, the sick cat exhibited a tendency to roll in the owner's soiled work attire, while the other cat did not.

Prior to the cat's illness, the owner experienced eye irritation but opted against testing for avian influenza.

Micrographs of bird flu viruses

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H5N1/bird flu virus particles. ([CDC/NIAID](#))

The CDC researchers have recommended that farmworkers take precautions by removing contaminated clothing and rinsing off any animal byproduct residues, including milk and feces, prior to entering their homes.

Since the onset of the outbreak in 2024, the U.S. has reported 69 human cases of avian influenza, though the actual number may be underreported due to insufficient testing among farmworkers. So far, one person has died.



Experts caution that with the virus circulating extensively among mammals and birds, there exists a potential risk for it to combine with seasonal influenza, conceivably mutating into a strain that facilitates efficient human-to-human transmission.

Newly appointed U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has expressed intentions to shift governmental focus away from infectious disease research, raising doubts about the pathogenicity of germs. Historically, he has questioned the efficacy of vaccines, deemed crucial for controlling avian influenza should it escalate to a pandemic, and has advocated for the consumption of raw milk, a known vector for the virus.

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Vocabulary List:

1. **Influenza** /,ɪn.fluˈɛn.zə/ (noun): An infectious viral disease that causes respiratory illness in humans and animals.
2. **Transmission** /trænz'mɪʃ.ən/ (noun): The act of transferring something from one location to another.
3. **Contaminated** /kən'tæm.ɪ.neɪ.tɪd/ (adjective): Made impure by exposure to or addition of a harmful substance.
4. **Epidemic** /,ep.ɪ'dem.ɪk/ (noun): A sudden increase in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected in a population.
5. **Pathogenicity** /,pæθədʒə'nɪsɪti/ (noun): The ability of an organism to cause disease.
6. **Mutation** /mju:'teɪ.ʃən/ (noun): The process by which the structure of a gene changes resulting in a variation of the organism.

Comprehension Questions

Multiple Choice

1. What troubling possibility is indicated by the recent CDC study?
Option: Humans may transmit avian influenza to domestic cats
Option: Cats can transmit avian influenza to humans
Option: Dogs are immune to avian influenza
Option: Avian influenza has no impact on mammals
2. In which month and year were the case studies from Michigan featured in the CDC report conducted?
Option: May 2024
Option: March 2023



Option: June 2025

Option: April 2022

3. How did the first cat in the case studies exhibit symptoms of avian influenza?

Option: Rapid decline in appetite, disorientation, lethargy, and severe neurological deterioration

Option: Aggression and increased appetite

Option: Hair loss and hyperactivity

Option: Coughing and sneezing

4. What is recommended by CDC researchers for farmworkers to prevent the spread of avian influenza?

Option: Change all clothing before entering the house

Option: Wear gloves at all times

Option: Rinse off any animal byproduct residues before entering the house

Option: Avoid contact with any animals

5. How many human cases of avian influenza were reported in the U.S. since the outbreak in 2024?

Option: 69 cases

Option: 100 cases

Option: 45 cases

Option: 31 cases

6. What does U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. advocate for regarding raw milk consumption?

Option: Consuming raw milk is safe for all animals

Option: Raw milk is a known vector for avian influenza

Option: Raw milk has no impact on virus transmission

Option: Raw milk should not be consumed by any animals

True-False

7. The first infected cat in the case studies survived after treatment.

8. Avian influenza can potentially mutate into a strain that enables efficient human-to-human transmission.

9. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is in favor of shifting focus from infectious disease research.

10. The sick cat in the second case study showed no interest in rolling in the owner's soiled work attire.

11. One person has died from avian influenza in the U.S. since the outbreak in 2024.



12. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has questioned the efficacy of vaccines.

Gap-Fill

13. The first case of avian influenza in cats was confirmed in the year _____.

14. The Maine Coon cat succumbed to avian influenza within _____ hours of showcasing symptoms.

15. The CDC has recommended farmworkers to remove contaminated clothing and rinse off residues before entering their homes since the outbreak in _____.

16. U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has expressed intentions to shift focus away from infectious disease research, raising doubts about the pathogenicity of _____.

17. Experts caution that there exists a potential risk for avian influenza to combine with _____, possibly mutating into a strain for efficient human-to-human transmission.

18. The sick Maine Coon cat had direct contact with unpasteurized milk transported from infected dairy cattle farms in _____.

Answer

Multiple Choice: 1. Humans may transmit avian influenza to domestic cats 2. May 2024 3. Rapid decline in appetite, disorientation, lethargy, and severe neurological deterioration 4. Rinse off any animal byproduct residues before entering the house 5. 69 cases 6. Raw milk is a known vector for avian influenza

True-False: 7. False 8. True 9. True 10. False 11. True 12. True

Gap-Fill: 13. 2024 14. 24 16. germs 17. seasonal influenza 18. Michigan

CATEGORY

1. Sci/Tech - LEVEL5

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