

PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Kathy Finnie, Executive Director
Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
802-878-6888
Kathy@vtvets.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Can Pets Get the Flu?

By the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
M. Kathleen Shaw, DVM

With the influenza (flu) season upon us, many Vermonters are curious if their pets can get the flu or if they can transmit it to them. With very few exceptions, most flu viruses are species specific and thus are unlikely to be transmitted between species. The influenza virus that people contract is not transmissible to our small animal companions, but it is transmissible to pigs. You also may have seen Avian (bird) Flu or Canine Influenza in the news.

In birds, influenza is very common virus in wild waterfowl worldwide. Most strains of avian influenza are unlikely to cause severe disease, but some strains are a major threat to commercial poultry production and sometimes other species, including humans who have close contact with infected birds. The virus has not been found in wild or domestic birds in North America. Normal cooking of any poultry or wild game will destroy the virus. Because a new strain of avian influenza has passed from birds to people, it is feared that it will mutate again or mix with an existing human influenza virus and develop the ability to pass from person to person. This change has not occurred in the virus at this time.

Canine Influenza Virus (CIV) is a different virus than the avian or human flu and it has not infected any humans. The disease appears to be more of a problem in a few areas of the country where dogs are housed closely together such as shelters, boarding facilities, breeding kennels, pet stores, rescue groups, dog shows, and greyhound racing tracks.

The primary symptoms of CIV in a dog are a cough and a high fever. It is important to know that there are many less severe diseases that show similar symptoms. If you see any such symptoms you should visit your veterinarian. Canine flu and other respiratory diseases are highly contagious and are spread just like the human flu: thru contact with secretions of the mouth and nose. So if your dog is coughing (whether or not it is the flu), don't take it near any other dogs including the kennel, pet store, dog park, or groomers. Even if a dog gets the canine flu virus, most likely it will recover with good care from your

veterinarian. There is a vaccine available, and you should discuss with your veterinarian whether or not it is right for your dog.

###

The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 340 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine. For more information, visit www.vtvets.org or call (802) 878-6888.