

## Avian Influenza and Infection in Dogs and Cats

Sandra Norman, DVM, a [Veterinary News Network](#) reporter from Indianapolis, has written a set of message points that will assist veterinarians in responding to questions from clients and local news media about the implications of H5N1 spreading to North America. As you are likely aware, H5N1 is spreading rapidly and caused at least 100 human deaths, countless avian deaths, and it has now killed cats and dogs. Because H5N1 is expected to enter North America during the fall bird migration, there are concerns about hunting dogs that may be exposed during hunting season.

The following message points may be helpful to you in answering questions about H5N1 in your community:

1. Highly pathogenic avian influenza of the H5N1 variety has mutated and infected wild and domestic birds in Europe and Asia along with humans who have had close (live with) contact with those infected birds
2. Because this is a new strain of avian influenza and it has passed from birds to people, it is feared that it will mix with an existing human virus and develop the ability to pass from person to person. This change has not occurred in the virus at this time.
3. Recently, domestic cats in Germany and a dog in Azerbaijan have been diagnosed with the H5N1 variety of avian influenza, resulting in fatal consequences.
4. Infection in these cats appears to have occurred by ingestion of infected H5N1 wild birds or by eating uncooked infected meat by the cat itself.
5. Dogs may have the same problems with ingestion of infected birds although it is not clear at this time. There is concern among bird dog owners and wild bird exposure through hunting. The virus has not been found in wild or domestic birds in North America.
6. If the virus is present in birds, cooking any raw poultry, especially wild birds, before feeding to a dog or cat would minimize exposure.
7. Keeping cats and dogs in, away from their hunting activity, would decrease the chance of exposure. Dead birds can be at risk for sharing other problems, so monitoring pets that hunt for any problems is appropriate.
8. None of the known strains of avian influenza have been shown to be transmissible between cats or dogs and people. Cats have shown to pass it to other cats in the same cage (It is not clear if cats or dogs can recover).
9. Veterinarians need to caution cat owners not to let go or get rid of their cats, but keeping them in, monitoring their activity and examination by a veterinarian at the first sign of problems will be important in minimizing the potential consequences of exposure to avian influenza
10. Testing is not available in the live animal, but dead animals can be examined for the presence of the H5N1 virus. There is a Type A influenza test which has been used for canine influenza, but it is not specific for H5N1.
11. There is no vaccine for this virus in dogs, cats or humans.

## Hurricane Pet Refugees: The Heartbreak of Heartworm

Traditionally, the majority of heartworm cases throughout the country have been found in the Mississippi River Valley and southeastern United States. But because of the Katrina refugees, some veterinarians worry it could begin making inroads in low-incidence areas.

In fact, upwards of 60 percent of pets evacuated from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are likely heartworm-positive. The high incidence has been attributed to the prevalence of mosquitoes in the hot, humid South and the fact many of the rescued animals may be strays, or do not appear to have had regular veterinary care.

Pet owner Phyllis DeGioia experienced heartworm firsthand in her rescued dogs. As the canine crisis unleashed by Hurricane Katrina came into focus, DeGioia quickly swung into action and signed up to foster Katrina refugees.

By late September 2005, just three weeks after the storm, she had taken in two hurricane dogs and helped a third find a foster home. Routine check-ups revealed Callie and Bella were both heartworm positive.

"I was certainly surprised to hear they had heartworm," DeGioia says. "I don't think anybody foresaw the vast number of heartworm positive cases coming out of Louisiana and Mississippi."

Dr. Tom Nelson, president of the American Heartworm Society, says it's too early to tell whether displaced Katrina dogs will spawn significant heartworm outbreaks in other regions. Animals can't be accurately diagnosed with heartworm for at least six and a half months after infection, he says. The chances of transmission are dependent upon the climate and time of year. Even if Katrina dogs haven't come to your area, Nelson says pet owners should have their animals tested.

DeGioia's confident one positive change will emerge from the Katrina tragedy: a greater understanding of the insidious nature of heartworm.

"I don't think many people were aware of the disease before," she says. "But now, it's front and center throughout the dog world."

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A significant onsite registration will throw off our food counts for the Spring Seminars. Therefore, pre-registrants will receive a meal ticket that will not be available to onsite registrants.

ISVMA is required to turn in a food count to the host hotels prior to the seminar. This food count is determined by the number of registrations. We will inform the hotel of the food count 3 days prior to the program. Therefore, we would appreciate it if you sent in your registrations as soon as possible.

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### About the Photo in This Issue...

The Wigeon or Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) is a common and widespread duck which breeds in the northernmost areas of Europe and Asia. It is the Old World counterpart of the North American American Wigeon. Although the Eurasian Wigeon has not yet been found breeding in North America, it is possible that some do.

The Eurasian Wigeons seen each year in North America likely come from eastern Siberia and Iceland. In North America, the Eurasian Wigeon is a rare wintering species, with two distinct populations. Along the Atlantic, there

are likely only a few hundred birds. Most of these winter near the coast from Massachusetts south to Chesapeake Bay. This population apparently breeds in Iceland. In migration they are often found near the Great Lakes and along the St. Lawrence River. Migration routes are largely unknown. A few birds have been found in summer in various parts of eastern Canada. In the west, there are probably several thousand birds occurring in North America. The main wintering concentration seems to be in the Fraser Delta of British Columbia and the adjacent plain in northwestern Washington. Eurasian Wigeon are frequently reported as far south as the Imperial Valley and San Diego in California.

The breeding male has grey flanks and back, with a black rear end and a brilliant white speculum, obvious in flight or at rest. It has a pink breast, white belly, and a chestnut head with a yellowish crown stripe. In non-breeding (eclipse) plumage, the drake looks more like the female. The female is light brown, with plumage much like a female Mallard. It can be distinguished from most other ducks, apart from American Wigeon, on shape. However, that species has a paler head and white axillaries on its underwing.

The Wigeon is a bird of open wetlands, such as wet grassland or marshes with some taller vegetation, and usually feeds by dabbling for plant food or grazing, which it does very readily. It nests on the ground, near water and under cover.

This is a noisy species. The male has a clear whistle, whereas the female has a low growl.

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