



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE FELINE - FIFe

To the Members, Officers and Judges of FIFe

Concerns: recommendation with respect to the so-called "Bird-Flue Virus" (H5N1 avian influenza)

Introduction

The first week of March the H5N1 avian influenza was detected in a domestic cat that was found dead on the German island of Ruegen. Since mid-February, more than 100 wild birds have died on the island, and tests have confirmed H5N1 infection in several.

Unlike the case in domestic and wild birds, there is no evidence that domestic cats are a reservoir of the virus. All available evidence indicates that cat infections occur in association with H5N1 outbreaks in domestic or wild birds. Experimental studies demonstrated that the H5N1 virus can infect domestic cats, and that cats can transmit the virus to other cats. In these experiments, the cats developed disease following direct inoculation of virus isolated from a fatal human case, and following the feeding of infected raw chicken.

The current H5N1 infection in birds has been accompanied by a few anecdotal reports of H5N1 infection in domestic cats. In all such reports, eating raw infected poultry was considered the most likely source of infection for the cats.

Advice: 1

Cats should be kept indoors in a 3 km radius in areas where wild birds infected with the H5N1 virus have been found, to prevent any contact between the two species. In case of possible contact between cats and infected wild birds or when cats show clinical symptoms of influenza (fever, general malaise, dyspnoeic, conjunctivitis, protrusion of the third eyelid and sometimes diarrhoea), cats should be kept in quarantine for further examination.

Advice: 2

Cats should be kept indoors in areas where poultry is infected with the H5N1 virus, to prevent any contact between the two species. In case of possible contact between cats and infected poultry or when cats show clinical symptoms of influenza, cats should be kept in quarantine for further examination.

Conclusion

There is no present evidence that domestic cats play a role in the transmission cycle of H5N1 viruses. To date, no human case has been linked to exposure to a diseased cat. No outbreaks in domestic cats have been reported. The risk that a cat will be infected with H5N1 virus is very limited, but cannot be neglected.

Do not feed your cats with raw poultry or other wild bird meat

Den Haag, 2nd March 2006,

Trudy Wessel van Putten-Secretary H&W Commission