



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
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Commissioner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## HEALTH DEPARTMENT INVESTIGATION OF H7N2 INFLUENZA IN SHELTER CATS CONFIRMS RISK TO HUMANS IS LOW

*One person, of more than 350 people screened, has been found with H7N2; this person is a veterinarian who had prolonged close exposure to respiratory secretions of sick cats at Animal Care Centers of NYC's (ACC) Manhattan shelter and has recovered from mild illness*

*Precautionary guidance issued for people who recently adopted a cat from any NYC shelter or rescue group*

**December 22, 2016** – The Health Department today announced that its ongoing investigation of an outbreak of low pathogenic avian influenza H7N2, a strain of influenza A virus, among cats housed at Animal Care Centers of NYC's (ACC) shelters confirms that the risk to humans is low. One person has been found with a presumptive diagnosis of this virus, which was identified by Health Department lab testing and preliminarily confirmed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lab testing yesterday. Further testing will be forthcoming in coming days.

The infected person is a veterinarian who was involved in obtaining respiratory specimens from sick cats at the Manhattan shelter. The illness was mild, short-lived, and has resolved. More than 160 ACC employees and volunteers, including several people who had similar exposure to sick cats, were screened by the Health Department and not found to have infection with the H7N2 virus. Additionally, the Health Department contacted more than 80% of the people who adopted cats from the Manhattan shelter, and none is suspected of having H7N2.

There have been two previous documented human cases of H7N2 infection in the United States – one in a person managing an outbreak of the virus in turkeys and chickens in 2002 and the other with an unknown source in 2003. Both of these patients also had mild illness and recovered. This is the first reported case due to exposure to an infected cat. There has been no documented human-to-human transmission.

“Our investigation confirms that the risk to human health from H7N2 is low, but we are urging New Yorkers who have adopted cats from a shelter or rescue group within the past three weeks to be alert for symptoms in their pets,” **said Health Commissioner Dr. Mary T. Bassett.** “We are contacting people who may have been exposed and offering testing as appropriate.”

As a precaution, the Health Department is issuing guidance to health care providers and veterinarians today to provide information on how to manage suspected cases.

Seasonal flu is on the rise in New York City and as always, the Health Department recommends that anyone with flu symptoms should promptly seek medical care, especially if you are pregnant or have an underlying illness or immunocompromising condition which could make seasonal flu more severe. Speak with your provider to see if you should be started on antivirals.

Although the flu vaccine does not protect against H7N2 virus, the Health Department continues to recommend New Yorkers get vaccinated to prevent seasonal flu. Find a place to get vaccinated [here](#).

New Yorkers should avoid nuzzling and close facial contact with sick cats, especially if they are pregnant or have an underlying disease that affects the immune system, such as cancer, diabetes, or chronic lung disease.

The Health Department will contact all employees and volunteers at ACC's three shelters to offer specific guidance to them.

### The Health of Infected Cats

Since last week, more than 100 cats have tested positive for H7N2 across all NYC shelters. This was expected because the virus is highly contagious among cats and cats are sometimes moved between shelters. All of the newly infected cats are experiencing mild illness and have been separated from other animals in the shelters. They are expected to recover. One cat admitted to the shelter with H7N2 infection died. ACC suspended adoptions of cats once the virus was discovered. The Health Department, working with ACC, the ASPCA and New York City Emergency Management, has identified a location where the cats will be quarantined soon, which will allow ACC to resume full intake and adoption of cats. The ASPCA will assume operational costs and manage the care of the cats.

All other ACC operations have continued. Cats are the only animal species that has tested positive for H7N2. Testing has been conducted by ACC on various other animal species, including dogs and rabbits, and all have tested negative. Until cats are removed to the new location and ACC's cat facilities are disinfected, New Yorkers are urged not to drop off cats at any ACC shelter. ACC will continue to distribute instructions to all new and recent cat adopters to monitor their cats, which includes guidance on checking animals for upper respiratory illness.

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