

Ebola virus disease (EVD) and household pets

The ongoing epidemic of Ebola in West Africa has raised several questions about how the disease affects animals, particularly household pets. Although there is evidence to suggest that several animals may be susceptible to Ebola, there have been no reports of dogs or cats becoming sick with Ebola or spreading Ebola to people or other animals. NSW Health and the Department of Primary Industries consider the risk of Ebola for pets in NSW to be very low.

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How are animals involved in Ebola outbreaks?

Fruit bats in Africa are considered to be the natural host of the Ebola virus and animals such as apes, monkeys or antelope catch the infection from bats. When humans become infected by touching or eating infected animals the virus can then pass from person to person causing an outbreak. Animals have not been found to be involved in the spread of outbreaks. Fruit bats in Australia are not known to carry the Ebola virus.

How is Ebola transmitted?

Ebola is spread from person to person via direct contact with blood, secretions or other bodily fluids of infected people, and contact with environments that may be contaminated with such fluids, including healthcare settings.

Can dogs or cats get sick with Ebola?

To date, there have been no reports of cats or dogs becoming sick with Ebola or transmitting it to other animals or humans. There is limited evidence to suggest that dogs can become infected with Ebola, but there is currently no evidence to demonstrate that they develop symptoms of the disease¹.

Can I get Ebola from my dog or cat?

At this time there have been no reports of dogs or cats becoming sick with Ebola or transmitting the virus to humans. The chances of a dog or cat becoming exposed to Ebola is very low in NSW, as the animal would have to come into contact with the bodily fluids of a person sick with Ebola who is experiencing symptoms. Currently there have been no people diagnosed with Ebola in Australia.

What if there is a pet in the home of a person infected with Ebola?

Local public health staff in collaboration with veterinarians from the Department of Primary Industries will assess the pet's risk of exposure to the virus from household members i.e. whether the pet has had close contact with an infected person and/or contact with their bodily fluids after they developed symptoms. Based on this risk assessment, local public health and animal health staff will determine how the pet should be managed. This may include the need for the pet to be placed in quarantine for a period of 21 days.

Can I get my dog or cat tested for Ebola?

There is no reason to test a dog or cat for Ebola unless there is a known exposure to an infected person.

For further information please call your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055 or visit the New South Wales Health Ebola virus webpage at:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/infectious/alerts/pages/EVD.aspx>

¹ Allela, et.al (2005) Ebola virus antibody prevalence in dogs and human risk. Emerging Infectious Diseases. 11:3. Pgs 385-390.