

H1N1 Test for Dogs and Cats Now Available

Company develops test to diagnose cats, dogs and other animals with the H1N1 virus.

Posted: December 10, 2009, 5 a.m. EST

Idexx Reference Laboratories of Westbrook, Maine, reported Tuesday that it has introduced a canine and feline H1N1 Influenza Virus RealPCR Test.

The test, which is in response to concern about the spread of the virus, is designed to help veterinarians diagnose and manage patients with suspected respiratory infection.

To date, H1N1 has been detected in cats, ferrets, pigs and birds, including turkeys. Two dogs in China also recently tested positive for the virus, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association, which cited the Xinhua News Agency on Nov. 28. Specifics of the China cases were not available at press time.

“The clinical signs of the H1N1 virus are likely to resemble other canine and feline respiratory infections,” said Christian Leutenegger, D.V.M., Ph.D., regional head of molecular diagnostics at Idexx Reference Laboratories.

“Offering the H1N1 Influenza Virus RealPCR Test with the Feline Upper Respiratory Disease and Canine Respiratory Disease RealPCR panels will help practitioners identify and differentiate multiple causes of respiratory infection for improved diagnosis and patient management,” Leutenegger said.

The same test is used to detect the virus in cats, dogs and other mammals, including ferrets, according to Dr. Leutenegger.

So far, it is believed that the infected pets contracted the virus from humans in their households who were sick with influenza-like symptoms. While there is no evidence these pets spread the virus to other animals or people, the potential exists for the H1N1 virus to infect companion animals as a result of close contact with infected family members, according to Idexx Reference Laboratories.

Still, the number of H1N1 pet-related cases is relatively small overall. When asked if these numbers are expected to increase, Leutenegger responded, “As testing for a particular infectious disease increases, this normally increases the number of positives detected. We do expect [the number of positive virus cases] to increase as doctors try to deliver the best care possible to their patients.”