



With Bird Flu Spreading To Cats, Local Cat Advocate Says Feed With Caution

Hsn1 Bird Flu Has Been Detected In One Brand Of Raw Cat Food, And Migrating Birds Can Spread Virus To Outdoor Cats

By Laurie Mason Schroeder

[Emmaus - With an uptick of documented cases of bird flu sickening domestic and wild cats in the U.S., a Lehigh Valley business with ties to the cat rescue community is sounding the alarm about the virus and urging cat owners to be cautious about what's in their cats' food dishes.

Purr Haus owner Laurie Mason Schroeder is urging cat owners to check the labels of raw cat food in their freezers, and to keep an eye out for dead birds around their properties.

"Cats are hunters by nature," she said. "Keeping our pet cats indoors is the best way to protect them from bird flu, as well as other dangers like predators and being hit by cars."

For people who feed community cats - felines that live outdoors, preferably after being trapped, fixed and vaccinated through TNR programs available in the Lehigh Valley - Mason Schroeder suggested moving cat feeding stations away from bird feeders, and cleaning up any dead birds or bird droppings they find. Unusual amounts of dead birds should be reported to county health departments.

Purr Haus does not sell raw cat food, but it has been gaining popularity in recent years among the store's customers. Earlier this month, the FDA warned against feeding cats raw or undercooked meat. So far, the virus has only been detected in one brand of commercial raw cat food, Northwest Naturals, which recalled a line of its products last week after a cat in Oregon died after eating frozen food from the company that contained raw turkey. Among the FDA's recommendations were that pet cats should be kept indoors to prevent them from hunting and eating wild birds.

"At Purr Haus, we advocate for all pet cats being indoor-only, and teach our customers how to provide enrichment for indoor cats through scheduled play and interaction."

Bird flu can affect cattle and other animals, but cats are especially susceptible to it. Last week, 20 cats at a Washington animal sanctuary, including cougars and African servals, died after eating wild birds. The virus has been prevalent on dairy farms and has been detected in raw milk.

Signs of bird flu in cats include lethargy, loss of appetite, fever, eye swelling and discharge, breathing issues and neurological symptoms such as tremors, seizures or blindness. Contact a veterinarian immediately if your cat shows any signs of illness, Mason Schroeder said.



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