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Oregon cat first in U.S. to die from H1N1 swine flu

by Laura Rillos KVAL News

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LEBANON, Ore. -- One week, Rhonda Rebmann's niece had the flu.

The next, her 10-year-old tabby cat started showing respiratory symptoms. Buddy Lou died four days after she brought the cat to the family's veterinarian, the first feline H1N1 death in the United States.

"It's crazy," said Rhonda Rebmann. "I would never have thought, never have thought a cat would have gotten this from a human."

A rare case



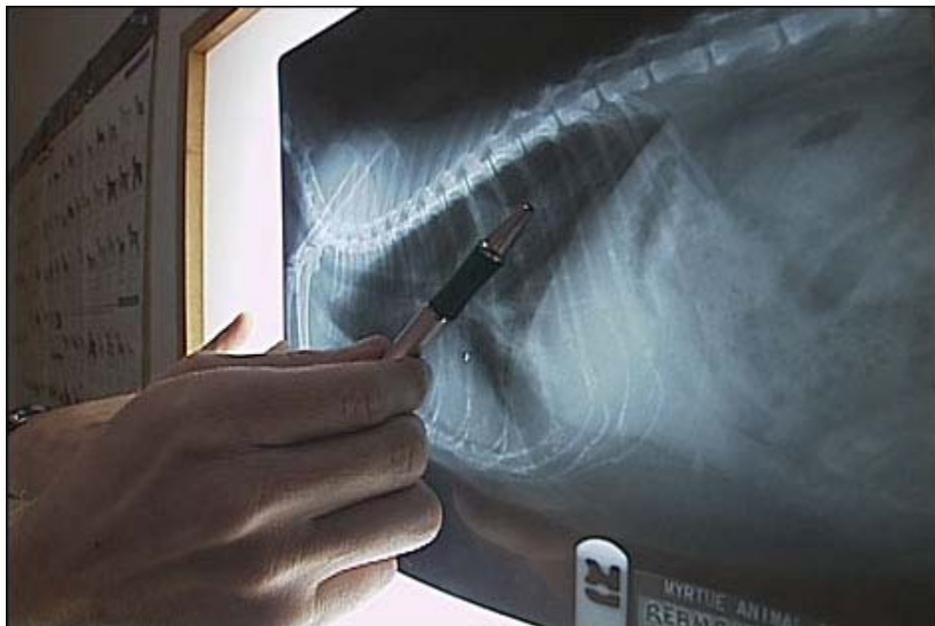
Veterinarians at the Lebanon Animal Clinic knew they were not dealing with a normal respiratory infection as soon as Buddy Lou arrived.

Cats with a regular respiratory infection sneeze and cough, but Buddy Lou's breathing was heavily labored.

Chest x-rays also painted a different picture.



According to Steve Hiette (above), a veterinarian who treated Buddy Lou, a cat with standard pneumonia has fluid build up in the bottom of their lungs. Fluid was accumulating higher in the tabby's lungs.



"So when we saw this we said, oh it's a different type of pneumonia," said Hiett, who said the cat did not respond to normal antibiotics or oxygen treatment.

Chest x-rays taken the night before Buddy Lou died show the fluid build up increased.



"It's gotten significantly worse," Hiett says, "the whole bottom field is filling with fluid to the point where it's obscuring the heart."

Emilio DeBess, State Public Health Veterinarian, says it's a human passing a disease to a cat is an interesting scientific development, but a rare one. He adds, cat owners should not panic about giving their pets the flu.

However, pet owners should take care handling their pets if they are sick.

DeBess recommends washing your hands before touching your pet or their food and water. Also, avoid touching your pet's nose, mouth and eyes.

What about other pets?



Four ferrets in Oregon have gotten sick with H1N1 and recovered. A ferret in Nebraska died.

Birds and pigs can also get H1N1.

So far, dogs have not contracted H1N1 but state health experts say they are not sure if dogs are immune or have just not contracted this strain of flu.

Buddy Lou lived with several other cats, who started showing symptoms of respiratory illness. One in particular had symptoms and x-rays just like Buddy Lou's. Although Hiatt says the staff became very worried at that point, all the animals recovered. Preliminary tests showed those cats did not have H1N1, but Hiatt is waiting on blood test results to see if the animals cleared the virus before the first test.