# Experts Warn of H5N1 Bird Flu Risk in Pets Due to Raw Food Consumption



### Concerns Arise Over H5N1 Bird Flu Transmission Through Pets

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Several experts, including epidemiologists, veterinarians, and food safety specialists, are expressing concerns about the potential risk of H5N1 bird flu evolving into a human threat through pets. They advise against feeding pets raw food, emphasizing dogs and cats' propensity for eating items that may be contaminated, such as dead animals and bird droppings.

Jane Sykes, a professor at UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, highlighted the substantial number of pets in the U.S. "Two-thirds of households have a dog or a cat," she noted, which translates to millions of potential transmission vectors. A study identified H5N1 antibodies in a group of Washington state hunting dogs, raising further alarms.

UK-based biologist Ian Redmond emphasized that pathogen spillover is more likely when species are in close contact, particularly with raw pet food of dubious origin. The raw food market, which includes uncooked meat, bones, fruits, and vegetables, poses a significant risk, according to Sykes.

California's Department of Food and Agriculture and the FDA are responsible for inspecting these products, but limitations exist. Experts recommend stringent hygiene practices when handling raw pet food to mitigate risks. "Veterinarians really don’t recommend feeding raw food diets to dogs and cats," Sykes reiterated, linking such diets to diseases like salmonella and listeriosis.

In response, there is a push for wider diagnostic testing for H5N1 in pets, similar to measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative aims to better prepare for and monitor potential outbreaks.