

Network uses pets as sentinels

U.S. researchers are using medical records of companion animals to develop an early warning system for disease threats including bird flu.

Scientists at Purdue University's School of Veterinary Medicine say the National Companion Animal Surveillance Program was originally designed to alert people to potential anthrax or plague outbreaks.

New findings on the program are detailed in the journal *Vector-Borne and Zoonotic Diseases*, a journal that focuses on diseases transmitted to humans via mosquitoes or directly from animals.

"This early warning will become critical to stop the spread of avian flu virus and other diseases that might affect humans," said Larry Glickman, a professor of epidemiology in the School of Veterinary Medicine.

"The quicker we can identify the problem in the more than 150 million dogs, cats or pet birds that live in approximately 40 percent of all U.S. households, the greater the probability we can contain a disease before it spreads to humans."

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