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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 29, 2009

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Swine Flu of Little Risk to Cats and Dogs, According to ASPCA®

NEW YORK—The ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) today announced that the recent human “Swine Flu” outbreak, thought to have originated in Mexico, appears to present little risk of infecting cats and dogs.

To date, only humans have been affected by the new A/H1N1 virus, and it is unknown whether the virus will impact other animals. Although the virus is being termed “swine flu,” researchers have not confirmed that this new strain evolved in pigs and are working to determine more about its origins.

“At this time there is no data demonstrating any risk of dogs and cats contracting this strain of the virus,” says Dr. Louise Murray, the Director of Medicine at the ASPCA’s Bergh Memorial Hospital in New York City. “However, owners of pet pigs, as well as farmers, should monitor their animals’ health more closely during this outbreak. Steps to limit possible transmission from humans to pigs and vice versa are recommended.”

Owners of Vietnamese potbellies, African pygmies and other pet pigs should be aware that there are Influenza type A vaccines available and recommended for healthy swine.

The ASPCA also recommends keeping pet pigs and swine farms isolated from any public exposure that might put them at risk for illness. The American Association of Swine Veterinarians suggests that visitors should not be allowed into swine production units, and for humans to avoid unnecessary contact with pigs. Because there are many causes of illness in pigs, if your pet pig is unwell, it is recommended to consult with your veterinarian.

Dr. Miranda Spindel, Director of ASPCA Veterinary Outreach adds, “Swine influenza or swine flu is caused by infection with Influenza A viruses and is one of the leading causes of respiratory disease in swine throughout the world. Like most Influenza A viruses, swine flu generally causes high levels of illness in pigs, but fatalities are uncommon. Although people do not normally contract swine influenza, humans have become infected when in contact with infected pigs or contaminated environments. Normally, human-to-human transmission of swine flu is temporary. However, as outbreaks have occurred in the past, swine flu is recognized for its potential to cause public health concern.”

The ability of any virus to cross species barriers and sustain transmission is dependent on many factors and occurs infrequently. Like all influenza viruses, swine flu viruses change constantly. Swine are unique in that they are able to host both avian and mammalian influenza viruses. It has been suggested that pigs can act as a reservoir, allowing avian influenza to adapt to mammalian species, and for influenza viruses to undergo genetic changes, emerging as entirely new and different viruses. When these new, mixed/mutated viruses appear, there is potential for humans to become infected and transmit the new virus among other people. The form of influenza that appears to have originated recently in Mexico is a never-before-seen genetic mixture of type A Influenza viruses originating in pigs, birds and people.

For more information about swine flu and updated information on prevention, the ASPCA recommends the following organizations the Center for Disease Control (<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu>), the American Veterinary

Medical Association (http://www.avma.org/public_health/influenza/swine/swine_flu_faq.asp) and the World Health Organization (<http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>), among other agencies, are coordinating guidance and updates on the evolving situation with swine flu.

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ABOUT THE ASPCA

Founded in 1866, the ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) was the first humane organization established in the Americas, and today has more than one million supporters throughout North America. A 501 [c] [3] not-for-profit corporation, the ASPCA's mission is to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States. The ASPCA provides local and national leadership in animal-assisted therapy, animal behavior, animal poison control, anti-cruelty, humane education, legislative services, and shelter outreach. The New York City headquarters houses a full-service, accredited animal hospital, adoption center, and mobile clinic outreach program. The Humane Law Enforcement department enforces New York's animal cruelty laws and is featured on the reality television series "Animal Precinct" on Animal Planet. For more information, please visit www.asPCA.org.