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NONPROFITS TACKLE DEADLY CANINE AND AVIAN FLU VIRUSES

Morris Animal Foundation and American Veterinary Medication Foundation partner to fund research into contagious infectious diseases

Denver/April 30, 2007 – With canine influenza leading to illness and deaths in dogs and avian influenza causing fatalities in birds, other animal species and humans, infectious diseases have garnered worldwide attention. Scientists and medical professionals worry about the ability these viruses have to jump from one species to another. Morris Animal Foundation (MAF) and the American Veterinary Medical Foundation (AVMF) are funding new research to help stop these deadly viruses before they can cause international pandemics.

“Canine and avian influenza viruses are serious infectious diseases that affect animals and people. Understanding the spread of these viruses and how they can jump species is critical,” said Patricia N. Olson, DVM, Ph.D., president/CEO of Morris Animal Foundation. The research will look at disease transmission and how to monitor and contain these viruses.

“The strength of the human-animal bond emphasizes the need for these kinds of studies,” declared Anna M. van Heeckeren, DVM, MS, chair of the AVMF Grants/Awards Committee. “The role of veterinarians serving as public health professionals bridges the gap between human and animal health. For the past decade, the AVMF has funded disaster preparedness initiatives as it affects animals. Understanding influenza virus infections in dogs and birds will help us prepare for a potential pandemic affecting both animals and humans, so it makes sense for the AVMF to fund these kinds of studies.”

Dr. Cynda Crawford at the University of Florida is the lead researcher on the study into canine flu. According to Dr. Crawford, shelter dogs are particularly susceptible to this virus because it is highly contagious before the dog shows clinical signs of infection.

“This study will determine the prevalence of influenza virus infections in shelters and identify the factors associated with its introduction and spread. We hope to develop effective guidelines for managing respiratory infections,” Crawford said.

While canine flu currently affects only dogs, avian flu (the H5N1 strain) has spread throughout Europe and Asia, affecting wild and domestic birds as well as other animal species and humans. Viral persistence in aquatic habitats is a critical component in the transmission of avian influenza viruses between wild birds, and from wild birds to domestic poultry.

Dr. Justin Brown, at the University of Georgia, is studying the ability of avian flu viruses to persist in water. As an MAF Fellowship Training grant recipient, Dr. Brown will receive mentorship from Dr. David Stallknecht, a recognized expert in avian influenza viruses. The project is part of the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study in the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Georgia.

“We would like to express our thanks and gratitude to Morris Animal Foundation and the American Veterinary Medical Foundation for providing financial support for our study,” Brown said. “We feel the results of our study will improve our understanding of avian influenza virus natural history and the risks of viral transmission from wild birds to domestic poultry.”

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Media Interviews Available With:

Cynda Crawford, DVM, Ph.D., University of Florida
Justin Brown, DVM, and David Stallknecht, Ph.D., University of Georgia
Patricia N. Olson, DVM, Ph.D., President/CEO, Morris Animal Foundation
Anna van Heeckeren, DVM, MS, Chair, AVMF Grants/Awards Committee

About Morris Animal Foundation: Morris Animal Foundation, established in 1948, is dedicated to funding research that protects, treats and cures companion animals and wildlife. MAF has been at the forefront of funding breakthrough research studies benefiting animals in some 100 countries, spanning all seven continents on earth. MAF has its headquarters in Denver, Colorado. The Foundation has funded more than 1,300 humane animal health studies with funds approaching \$50 million. One hundred percent of all annual, unrestricted contributions support animal health studies, not administration or the cost of fundraising. For more information, call (800) 243-2345, or visit www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org.

About the American Veterinary Medical Foundation: The American Veterinary Medical Foundation (AVMF) is a national, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established in 1963. AVMF protects and advances the medical care and well being of animals by raising and distributing funds in support of animal disaster preparedness and response and animal health studies. In the last decade, AVMF has awarded grants totaling over \$7 million in support of this mission. The ultimate goal of the AVMF is to help as many states as possible be prepared for disasters affecting animals. For more information, please visit our website at www.avmf.org or call 800-248-2862 ext. 6690.