

# Health Information for People in Contact with Backyard Poultry that Tested Positive for Influenza A(H5N1)

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## Background

- Since 2022, the avian influenza virus influenza A (H5N1) has been associated with outbreaks in wild birds, domestic poultry, dairy cattle, and other wild and domesticated animals, such as cats.
- Avian influenza is a disease of birds carried naturally by wild waterfowl, such as ducks or geese. Wild birds may not show signs of illness, but H5N1 causes severe illness and death in domestic poultry.
- Avian influenza A(H5N1) virus is considered low risk to the public, but there is a greater risk for those who handle and care for infected animals.
- Sick animals may be able to transmit influenza virus to people in their saliva, feces, milk, and other body fluids. Human infections can occur when the virus is inhaled or gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth.

## Human health risk

- H5N1 virus is considered low risk to the public, but there is a greater risk for those who handle and care for infected animals.
- Sick animals may be able to spread influenza virus to people in their saliva, feces, milk, and other body fluids. Human infections can occur when the virus is inhaled or gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Symptoms in people can include fever, body aches, respiratory illness, and red or itchy eyes.
- Wearing proper personal protective equipment (PPE) reduces the risk of infection.

## How is HPAI spread

- Infected birds shed HPAI viruses in their saliva, nasal discharge, and feces. Wild birds become infected when they gather during spring and fall migrations.
- Spread to people occurs through close contact with infected birds or their contaminated bedding, feed, or water troughs.
- Person-to-person spread is very rare.

## How to protect yourself

- If birds in your flock have avian (bird) influenza (flu) A virus infection, or you suspect they might, take the following actions to protect yourself:
  - Don't touch sick or dead birds, their feces or litter, or any surface or water source (for example, ponds, waterers, buckets, pans, troughs) that might be contaminated with their saliva, feces, or any other bodily fluids without wearing personal protective equipment (PPE).

## HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA A(H5N1): WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Wear PPE when around sick or dead birds. PPE should include:
  - Safety goggles (unvented or indirectly vented) that fit snugly,
  - gloves that are disposable,
  - rubber boots (or waterproof boots that can be disinfected) or boot covers,
  - an N95 respirator if available, or, if not available, a well-fitting facemask (e.g., a surgical mask)
  - coveralls that are disposable and fluid-resistant,
  - and disposable head cover or hair cover.
    - You can buy these items online or at many retail, hardware, or feed stores.
- As best as possible, during depopulation and while cleaning and disinfecting contaminated premises, avoid stirring up dust, bird waste, and feathers to prevent virus from dispersing into the air.
- You should continue to wear PPE when in contaminated areas until there are no longer infected birds, eggs, feces, or contaminated litter on the property.

### How to protect your backyard flock

- Backyard flocks of chickens, ducks, geese, and other poultry are at risk of getting avian influenza A(H5N1) from wild birds, especially if they roam outdoors.
- The Minnesota Board of Animal Health (BAH) recommends practicing good [Biosecurity \(www.bah.state.mn.us/biosecurity/\)](http://www.bah.state.mn.us/biosecurity/) to protect backyard flocks from possible HPAI infection.
- Report any sick birds as quickly as possible. Call your local veterinarian or the Minnesota Avian Influenza Hotline and follow the prompts: 1-833-454-0156.
- Visit the University of Minnesota Extension at [Avian influenza basics for urban and backyard poultry owners \(extension.umn.edu/poultry-health/avian-influenza-basics-noncommercial-poultry-flock-owners\)](http://extension.umn.edu/poultry-health/avian-influenza-basics-noncommercial-poultry-flock-owners) for more information.

### What do if you find sick or dead birds

- Call the Minnesota Avian Influenza Hotline and follow the prompts: 1-833-454-0156.
- Fill out [Sick Bird Report Form | BAH \(bah.state.mn.us/report-sick-birds\)](http://bah.state.mn.us/report-sick-birds) to report sick or dead birds.

### Public Health Monitoring

- The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) will contact you to do a short interview about your interactions with sick birds and to answer any questions you may have.
- If you had contact with sick or dying birds, we would like to contact you twice after the interview on days 5 and 10 from your last exposure to the birds to ask about any respiratory illness or eye infection.
- You will receive an email with a link to a two-question survey on your monitoring days (If you would prefer to be contacted by phone/text, that will also be an option).
- Having respiratory symptoms does not mean you are sick with avian influenza H5N1, as these symptoms are common in a variety of illnesses.

## HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA A(H5N1): WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- If you develop symptoms and you agree to it, MDH will help arrange for you to be tested.
- Contact MDH at 651-201-5414 and ask for the Zoonotic Diseases Unit for questions on human health risk from avian influenza and how to protect yourself.

### For more information

- [CDC: Backyard Flock Owners: Caring for Yourself and Others \(CDC: Backyard Flock Owners: Caring for Yourself and Others \(cdc.gov/bird-flu/caring/index.html\)\)](https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/caring/index.html)
- [Bird Flu Current Situation Summary \(cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm\)](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm)
- [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Response \(bah.state.mn.us/hpai/\)](https://bah.state.mn.us/hpai/)

**If you have questions or develop respiratory symptoms after working with ill poultry, call 651-201-5414 and ask for the Zoonotic Diseases Unit.**

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*To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414.*