What to know and do about H5N1 Bird Flu

Helping agricultural producers protect their people, production, and the public is a national priority.



As an agricultural producer, you play a vital role in public health. It's essential that you have trusted and reliable information that you can use and share with your employees working on the frontlines of the ongoing H5N1 bird flu outbreak. Using this resource, you can better understand the disease, identify its symptoms in humans, and make the best choices to protect yourself, your employees, your business, and those who consume the products you produce.

The Basics

Understand the basics of H5N1 bird flu and how it spreads

H5N1 bird flu:

1. Is a viral disease that should be taken seriously.
2. Primarily infects poultry (e.g., chickens, turkeys, ducks) and other wild birds and has recently infected dairy cows.
3. Has resulted in the deaths/culling of millions of birds in the United States.
4. May include symptoms in humans that are not typical for flu (e.g., conjunctivitis, commonly known as "pink eye").

How it spreads

Poultry can become infected with H5N1 bird flu through direct contact with infected waterfowl or other infected poultry, or through contact with contaminated surfaces. Similarly, livestock, including dairy cows, can be infected if they are exposed to environments contaminated with H5N1 bird flu. In humans, H5N1 bird flu spreads when enough virus gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth or is inhaled from an infected bird or animal. No person-to-person spread of bird flu has been detected.

Critical risks to manage with H5N1 bird flu include:

1. Reducing the number of undetected/unreported symptoms in agricultural workers.
2. Limiting the conditions that could allow for changes in the virus to occur which could result in more efficient human-to-human transmission.

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PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS COLLABORATIVE

Protect and Inform

Take extra precautions due to increased risk of infection

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Agricultural producers, such as poultry, dairy, and livestock farmers and workers, may experience close and/or sustained unprotected contact with infected birds or animals or their contaminated environments. This can create a greater risk of infection and make knowing and checking for human symptoms important to help prevent the spread of H5N1 bird flu. If you or your employees have sustained contact with poultry, dairy cattle, or livestock, take the following actions to minimize the risk of H5N1 bird flu exposure for yourself, your team, and the people in your community:

- **Wear PPE:** Learn how to properly put on, wear, remove, and reuse or dispose of PPE. Resources with this information are available from the CDC in English and Spanish. Examples of PPE include:
  - Disposable outer garments with long sleeves and a sealed apron.
  - Disposable gloves or heavier work gloves that can be disinfected.
  - Properly-fitted high filtration masks such as N95s, KN95s, and KF94s.
  - Safety goggles and disposable head coverings.
  - Disposable shoe covers or boots that can be cleaned and disinfected.
- **Wash** hands thoroughly with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub after contact with birds and other animals.
- **Avoid** touching one's own eyes, nose, and mouth after direct contact.

Find information about several programs that support agricultural producers in navigating the H5N1 bird flu outbreak, including programs that offset the financial cost to provide PPE to employees, on the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service website.

Make information accessible across languages

Providing safety information in the language most familiar to your employees can help increase understanding and the likelihood of important actions being taken. You can also support your employees by becoming familiar with resources and care providers in your community specifically focused on supporting those for whom English is a second language and by encouraging your employees to use those resources when it is appropriate.

Implement environmental property controls to help limit the presence of wild birds on your premises

Reducing the attractiveness of your property to wild birds that are potential carriers of the H5N1 bird flu can help limit their presence among the animals on your premises. Consider implementing these control measures to protect you, your employees, and your animals:

- Limit available food and water supplies by cleaning up grain spills, using birdproof grain storage containers, and using covered feeders.
- Properly secure openings in lofts, vents, windows, doorways, and eaves.
- Consider consulting with a wildlife pest control expert who may be able to provide recommendations for your specific situation.

The Symptoms

Be familiar with the symptoms to detect an employee's H5N1 bird flu infection

Even with a solid understanding of H5N1 bird flu and the actions that reduce exposure, infections can still happen. To help determine if an employee has become infected, it's important to keep watch for these symptoms, which are similar to seasonal flu:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Eye infections
- Difficulty breathing
- Pneumonia
- Severe respiratory disease

If your employees have had close and/or sustained unprotected contact with infected birds or animals or their contaminated environments, encourage them to be tested for H5N1 bird flu and monitor them for these symptoms for 10 days after their last exposure.

Guide and Notify

Guide your employees to the appropriate medical care and notify your public health department

If an employee has these symptoms, encourage them to speak with a healthcare professional and isolate from others until it is determined that there is no H5N1 bird flu infection. The same diagnostic tools that are used to detect seasonal influenza viruses like the flu can also detect H5N1 bird flu. If an H5N1 bird flu diagnosis is confirmed, you should:

1. Contact the local or state public health department so they can assist in monitoring and advising when isolation is no longer required.
2. Encourage those who have been in close contact with a person infected by H5N1 bird flu to monitor for symptoms. Have them contact a healthcare professional if new symptoms appear, especially respiratory symptoms, eye redness, or conjunctivitis.

The information provided in this resource is based on what is known to date, as of December 2025. This health guidance could change as more information becomes available. Stay tuned to H5N1 bird flu updates from federal, state, and local officials, and share new information with your employees as it becomes available.

Resources used in the creation of this content:

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