IOWA | Health and Human Services

Worker Health, Safety, and on-farm Biosecurity

Novel flu viruses in animals occasionally become able to infect people and make them sick. But many steps that keep livestock and poultry healthy when properly implemented also keep workers healthy. Premises can take the following steps to keep both their workers and animals healthy.

1. Use good biosecurity practices.

Steps taken to protect human or animal health against disease is biosecurity. Biosecurity helps keep diseases off farms. Animals that are sick can transmit disease to people, these are called zoonotic diseases. Keeping animals healthy reduces the risk of zoonotic diseases for workers.

To learn ways to improve biosecurity practices:

- **Work with your regular veterinarian.**
- **Visit the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's biosecurity webpage.**

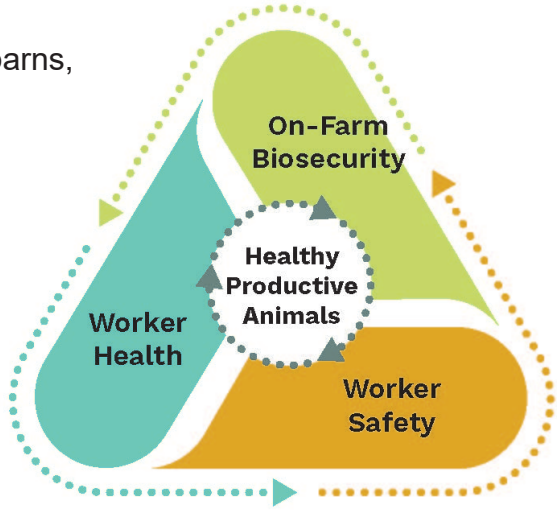
2. Encourage good health practices for workers.

People can also transmit zoonotic diseases to animals, such as the influenza virus. Healthy workers reduce this risk.

To learn ways to promote good worker health:

- **Encourage employees to speak to their trusted healthcare provider** about what vaccines will help them stay healthy. You can use the "Ask Me About Vaccines" materials from Iowa Department of Health and Human Services as a resource. If an employee does not have a regular healthcare provider, many local pharmacies and some local public health agencies offer vaccines. Employees can find vaccine providers close to them by entering their ZIP code on vaccines.gov. Additional information on developing a Worksite Influenza Vaccination Program is available upon request from Iowa HHS.
- **Advise employees to use good hand hygiene practices.** Employees reduce the risk of disease transmission between animals and people by washing hands after the following activities:
    1. leaving areas where animals live (such as coops, barns, and stalls),
    2. before preparing food or drinks,
    3. before eating or drinking,
    4. before using tobacco products or vaping, and
    5. after removing soiled clothes, shoes, or personal protective equipment (PPE).

Following these practices reduces the risk of disease transmission from animals to people and from people carrying disease to other animals.



3. Take steps to reduce workers' exposure to zoonotic diseases from sick animals or contaminated environments.

When animals are not healthy, there is a greater risk of zoonotic disease transmission to people. There are many ways to reduce the risk of zoonotic disease transmission including engineering controls, administrative controls, and personal protective equipment (PPE). However, every premises and animal interaction are different, and not all controls and PPE are practical or safe during some tasks or in some settings.

To determine which are right for workers on a premises:

- **Refer to CDC's Interim Guidance for Employers to Reduce Exposure to Novel Influenza A (Such as H5N1 Bird Flu) for People Working with or Exposed to Animals.** This guidance describes the highest possible protection based on exposure level. If all recommended PPE is not available or practical, prioritize PPE workers can use safely and effectively. In the U.S., the science to-date shows human infections of novel influenza A are mainly caused when the virus gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth while not wearing minimal levels of PPE. Utilization of at minimum the following PPE helps mitigate this risk: **mask, eye protection,** and **gloves**. While utilizing only available or minimal levels of PPE will help reduce risk, this approach may not mitigate risk as much as utilizing the highest level of PPE recommended.

When different protective steps are available, pick the options that work best for the premises and workers.

Additional Resources:

- Iowa HHS Respirators and Fit Testing. These resources can be used in any setting, including agricultural, to establish a respiratory protection program for workers. *https://hhs.iowa.gov/center-acute-disease-epidemiology/hai-prevention/respirators-and-fit-testing*
- Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health. Located at the University of Iowa, the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health has numerous resources, including resources specific to novel influenza and animals. *https://gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/* *https://gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/avian-influenza-information/*
- Farm Biosecurity is important to keep animals healthy and animal businesses productive. The Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University has resources that can help prevent diseases in livestock (cattle, swine, sheep, goats) and poultry. *https://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/biosecurity/*
- On December 31, 2024, the article Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A(H5N1) Virus Infections in Humans was published that summarizes the exposure factors that led to human infections in the U.S. as well as the illness severity of the infections. Highlighting the need for mitigating exposures to a person's eyes, nose, and mouth when working with infected animals. *https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2414610*