

## BACKGROUND

**Q:** What is avian influenza?

- Avian influenza (bird flu) refers to the disease caused by the infection with avian (bird) influenza (flu) type A viruses.
- Avian influenza viruses naturally spread among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.
- Avian influenza viruses do not normally infect humans but human infections with avian influenza viruses have occurred.
- Human infections with avian influenza viruses have happened after close, prolonged, unprotected exposure to infected birds or dairy cattle, or an environment that has been contaminated by infected animals (e.g., feces, saliva or mucous).
- Avian influenza viruses are classified by animal health officials as either high or low pathogenicity based on how sick the virus makes domestic poultry such as chickens, turkeys, etc. Therefore, you may hear the virus referred to as Low Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (LPAI) or Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). **This classification does not indicate how the virus will behave in other animals such as cattle or how it will behave in people.**
- Influenza A (H5N1) is the current strain of avian influenza circulating in wild birds and affecting poultry and cattle in the United States. There are many strains of avian influenza.

## HUMAN HEALTH

**Q:** Have any people in the U.S. become sick with highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)?

- There have been sporadic human cases linked to infected cattle or poultry exposures.
  - CDC updates a [table of confirmed human cases](#) in the U.S. at 5:00 p.m. EST every Monday. There has been one human case reported in [Iowa](#).

**Q:** How did these people get HPAI?

- Cases reported direct contact with animals infected with HPAI.
- None of the human cases are associated with other human cases (i.e. there is no person-to-person linkage).

**Q:** Does the current strain of HPAI in the U.S. pose a risk to the general public?

- CDC believes the current risk to the public is low but is monitoring the situation carefully and working with affected states to monitor people with exposures to infected animals.
  - Learn more about monitoring exposed persons at <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/h5-monitoring/index.html>.

**Q:** What should medical providers do if they suspect their patient has or was exposed to HPAI?

- Contact their local public health agency or contact the Iowa HHS Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE) at 1-800-362-2736.

**Q:** If there is a HPAI detection in Iowa, what is the public health response?

- Because of the potential for influenza viruses to constantly change, continued surveillance and preparedness efforts are critical. Iowa HHS works with other areas to take measures to be ready in case the public health risk assessment changes.
- Over the past few years there have been several HPAI detections in Iowa. When Iowa HHS is notified of HPAI in animals, an epidemiologist from Iowa HHS contacts the appropriate county to initiate monitoring for all persons that have been in contact with the HPAI positive or potentially positive animals.
- Additional guidance can be found on the [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Virus: Interim Recommendations for Prevention, Monitoring, and Public Health Investigations | Bird Flu | CDC](#) webpage.

**Q:** How often are persons exposed to infected animals (or their materials) monitored for symptoms of HPAI?

- In Iowa, those exposed to HPAI are monitored with simple symptom check-ins every 5 days, continuing through 10 days after their last possible exposure.

## **FOOD SAFETY**

**Q:** Are poultry, eggs, and dairy products available in retail markets safe for consumers?

- There is no evidence to suggest that the consumption of fully cooked poultry, beef, game meat, organs or eggs can transmit the H5N1 virus to humans. All evidence to date indicates that thorough cooking will “kill” (inactivate) the virus.
- Nearly all (99%) of the commercial milk supply that is produced on dairy farms in the U.S. comes from farms that participate in the [Grade A Milk Safety Program](#) and follow the [Pasteurized Milk Ordinance](#) (PMO), which includes controls that help ensure the safety of dairy products. Even if the virus is detected in raw milk, the current pasteurization process (HTST – High Temperature, Short Time) will “kill” (inactivate) the virus.
  - Additional information is available at <https://www.fda.gov/food/alerts-advisories-safety-information/investigation-avian-influenza-h5n1-virus-dairy-cattle#Status>.

## **ANIMAL HEALTH**

**Q:** How long has HPAI been in U.S. poultry?

- The ongoing response in U.S. poultry started when the first flock tested positive for HPAI in Indiana in February 2022. Since then, it has been found at various times in flocks in all U.S. states. With periodic poultry detections in Iowa since March 2022.
- The following USDA webpage has a dashboard displaying current detections in the U.S., including Iowa: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/commercial-backyard-flocks>

**Q:** How long has HPAI been in U.S. dairy cattle?

- On March 25, 2024, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the Texas Animal Health Commission confirmed the presence of HPAI in two Texas and two Kansas dairies, the first cattle cases of HPAI reported in the U.S.
  - The current epicenter of the HPAI outbreak in dairy cattle is occurring in California.
- The following USDA webpage has a dashboard displaying current detections in the U.S.: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/hpai-confirmed-cases-livestock>

**Q:** What should a farmer do if they are concerned their dairy cows are sick with HPAI?

- Farmers must report any unusual symptoms in cattle to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) at 515-281-5305. Farmers should also inform their herd veterinarian.
- Visit the IDALS avian influenza webpage: <https://iowaagriculture.gov/animal-industry-bureau/avian-influenza>.

**Q:** What should I do if someone reports dead or sick wild birds in my community?

- Advise members of your community:
  - To avoid handling sick or dead birds.
    - If they must handle a dead bird (i.e. homeowner removing it from their property), advise wearing at minimum gloves and a mask, double bagging the carcass, then performing good hand hygiene practices afterwards. For disposal of the carcass in local garbage pickup or at a landfill, advise them to check with their local trash hauler requirements and confirm that the landfill accepts animal carcasses.
    - If they report waste from sick or dead birds on their clothes or shoes, advise washing clothing in hot water and to disinfect shoes (after removing any gross contamination such as visible poop) by spraying the outside with a benzalkonium chloride based commercial disinfectant (such as Lysol\* spray or similar product) and allowing them to dry.
  - Keep their pets away from sick or dead birds.
  - Not to bring sick birds home or take them to a wildlife rehabilitator.
- The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) asks those who find five or more sick or dead flocking birds within a week to report their findings to their local wildlife biologist or state conservation officer. DNR is also interested in reports of solitary birds or mammals.
  - DNR contact information is available online at [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov) under the About DNR tab on the homepage. (<https://www.iowadnr.gov/media/1596/download?inline>)

## PUBLIC INFORMATION

**Q:** Is information regarding farms with HPAI released publicly?

- IDALS considers the site address/location, owner name, and owner PIN (premises ID number) of affected farms to be confidential business information and never releases it publicly. IDALS only releases a site-specific code assigned to the farm (*structured as County Name ##*).
  - This information is shared with the respective local public health departments of the counties where the farms are located.

**Q:** Is information regarding workers on farms with HPAI released publicly?

- Iowa Code 139A.3(3) mandates Iowa HHS to maintain the confidentiality of reports or other information pertaining to reportable diseases and does not release them publicly. This includes persons identified as infected or exposed to a reportable or other disease (such as HPAI) or condition, or other information within the report such as business names or other identifiable information.
  - When residents of a county are potential exposed to HPAI and need to complete a risk assessment and a monitoring period, Iowa HHS shares the contact information with that respective local public health department so they can complete the follow-up.

**Q:** What information is shared publicly?

- IDALS issues a press release every time HPAI is detected on an Iowa farm.
  - Press releases can be found at <https://iowaagriculture.gov/news>.
- The Office of the Governor typically issues a disaster proclamation for a county when HPAI is detected for the first time on one of their farms.
  - Disaster proclamations can be found at <https://homelandsecurity.iowa.gov/disasters/governors-disaster-proclamations>.

**Q:** Who can I contact if I need help with a media inquiry?

- For public health related issues:
  - Alex Murphy
  - Director of Communications
  - [alex.murphy@hhs.iowa.gov](mailto:alex.murphy@hhs.iowa.gov)
- For animal health related issues:
  - Don McDowell
  - Communications Director
  - (515) 326-1616
  - [Don.McDowell@IowaAgriculture.gov](mailto:Don.McDowell@IowaAgriculture.gov)