



# H5N1 Avian Flu

*Frequently asked questions and talking points*

Last updated April 28, 2022

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## What is H5 influenza virus, H5N1, or avian flu?

- Avian influenza viruses are spread among poultry and wild birds and are highly contagious, deadly foreign animal diseases.
- Wild birds, waterfowl and shorebirds in particular, can carry these viruses without getting sick and spread these viruses to poultry. When infected, domestic poultry experience a mortality rate of 90%-100%.
- While rare, human infections can happen after close, prolonged, unprotected exposure to infected birds or an environment that has been contaminated by infected birds (e.g., feces, mucous, saliva).
- Certain strains of avian influenza are also zoonotic.

## How and where was H5N1 detected in a human in Colorado?

- The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has been monitoring and testing people exposed to poultry and wild birds infected with avian flu (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, HPAI), also known as H5N1 flu. A test during the week of April 25 revealed the presence of the influenza A (H5) virus in a single nasal specimen from a male younger than 40 who was working on a farm with infected poultry in Montrose County. CDC confirmed the result on April 27, 2022.
- Repeat testing was negative for influenza. Because he was in close contact with infected poultry, the virus may have been present in his nose without causing infection.
- The adult male was largely asymptomatic, reporting only fatigue. He is now isolating and receiving the influenza antiviral drug oseltamivir (tamiflu) per CDC guidance.
- This positive result is due to direct exposure to infected poultry at a commercial farm in Montrose County. The person is a detainee at a state correctional facility in Delta County and was working with poultry as part of a pre-release employment program where participants have the opportunity to work for private employers and be paid a prevailing wage.
- All members of the response team, including other detainees, were provided personal protective equipment while working on the farm.

## Where has H5N1 been identified in poultry?

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has been detected in wild birds and poultry across many states, including Colorado. The Colorado Department of Agriculture has published all detections of HPAI in poultry and wild birds in Colorado on the [CDA website](#). USDA has published all detections of HPAI in poultry and wild birds on the [APHIS website](#).

### Why was CDPHE testing people exposed to poultry and wild birds?

- The U.S. poultry industry maintains rigorous health and safety standards, including routine monitoring for avian influenza. People who come in contact with infected poultry who become symptomatic are tested as a precautionary measure.
- CDC has been monitoring people with H5N1 flu virus exposures since public health experts detected H5N1 flu outbreaks in U.S. wild birds and poultry in late 2021 and into 2022.
- As of April 28, scientists have found H5N1 viruses in wild birds in 34 states and in commercial and backyard poultry in 29 states. For the latest numbers, visit [CDC's website](#). So far, H5N1 viruses circulating in birds in the U.S. lack genetic changes seen in the past that have been associated with viruses spreading easily among poultry, infecting people more easily, or causing severe illness in people or mammalian animal models.

### What is the risk to the general public?

- The risk to the general public is low as H5 flu viruses mainly spread among wild birds and poultry.
- H5 flu viruses do not normally infect humans nor spread from person to person. There are currently no known cases of this H5 flu virus spreading among people.
- There are no other confirmed human cases in Colorado or the United States at this time.
- Human infections happen when the virus is inhaled or gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth. People with close or lengthy unprotected contact (not wearing respiratory protection or eye protection) with infected birds or places that sick birds or their mucous, saliva, or feces have touched, may be at greater risk of infection.

### How does avian flu spread?

- Wild birds, waterfowl and shorebirds in particular, can carry these viruses without getting sick and spread these viruses to poultry. Domestic poultry get very sick and often die from these viruses.
- H5 flu viruses do not normally infect humans nor spread from person to person. There are currently no known cases of this H5 flu virus spreading among people.
- While human infections of the H5N1 viruses are rare, direct exposure to infected birds increases that risk. Infected birds shed flu viruses in their saliva, mucous, and feces.

### What can I do to protect myself?

- People should avoid direct contact with wild birds and observe them only from a distance, if possible. Wild birds can be infected with avian flu viruses without appearing sick.
- Avoid direct contact with domestic birds (poultry) that appear ill or have died.
- Avoid direct contact with surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from wild or domestic birds, if possible.
- If you must handle wild birds or sick or dead poultry, minimize direct contact by wearing gloves and washing your hands with soap and water afterwards.

- You can minimize direct contact by wearing gloves and washing your hands with soap and water after touching birds. If available, wear respiratory protection such as a medical facemask. Change your clothing before contact with healthy domestic poultry and birds after handling wild birds, and throw away the gloves and facemask, and then wash your hands with soap and water. Additional information is available at [Information for People Exposed to Birds Infected with Avian Influenza Viruses of Public Health Concern](#).
- CDC has [guidance for specific groups of people](#) with exposure to poultry, including poultry workers and people responding to poultry outbreaks.
- There is no routine vaccination for humans for H5N1 viruses.

### Is it safe to eat poultry?

It is safe to eat properly handled and cooked poultry and poultry products in the United States. The proper handling and cooking of poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165° F kills bacteria and viruses, including H5N1 viruses.

### What if I have been exposed to sick poultry?

- [People who have had direct contact with infected bird\(s\)](#) and who develop any illness symptoms within 10 days of their last exposure to infected birds should immediately notify a health care provider about their exposure so they can be evaluated and tested for avian influenza A virus infection and other possible causes of their symptoms.
- Signs and symptoms of avian influenza A virus infection are non-specific and variable and may include:
  - Fever (temperature of 100°F [37.8°C] or greater) or feeling feverish.
  - Cough.
  - Sore throat.
  - Runny or stuffy nose.
  - Muscle or body aches.
  - Headaches.
  - Fatigue.
  - Eye redness (or conjunctivitis).
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Less common signs and symptoms are:
  - Diarrhea.
  - Nausea.
  - Vomiting.
  - Seizures.

### What preventive measures should bird and poultry owners take to protect their flocks?

- **Increase biosecurity:** It is extremely important for poultry owners to increase biosecurity measures to protect their birds. The [USDA Defend the Flock](#) website has helpful resources for keeping poultry healthy in any operation. Commercial poultry producers can use [this toolkit](#) to assess their biosecurity practices and preparedness.
- **Monitor flocks:** Monitor your flock for [clinical signs](#) of H5N1, including monitoring production parameters (feed and water consumption, egg production) and increased morbidity and mortality. Any changes in production parameters that could indicate H5N1 should be reported.

- **Report disease:** It is important for veterinarians and producers to report any suspicious disease events in poultry flocks to the State Veterinarian's office at 303-869-9130. If it is after hours, the voicemail message will indicate which veterinarian is on call. If you have sick birds or birds that have died from unknown causes, help is available at the Colorado Avian Health Call Line at Colorado State University Their number is 970-297-4008.
- **Secure food supply:** The Colorado Department of Agriculture strongly encourages poultry producers to enroll as a Secure Food Supply participant through their office. The most important component of ensuring your continuity of business in an outbreak is to enroll in Secure Food Supply and have a biosecurity plan in place. If you would like more information, contact [dave.dice@state.co.us](mailto:dave.dice@state.co.us) or 303-263-2407.

#### What should I do if I think a bird is sick or suspect my flock is infected?

- People should avoid direct contact with wild birds and observe them only from a distance, if possible. Wild birds can be infected with avian flu viruses without appearing sick.
- Monitor your flock for [clinical signs](#) of H5N1, including monitoring production parameters (feed and water consumption, egg production) and increased morbidity and mortality. Any changes in production parameters that could indicate H5N1 should be reported.
- In addition to practicing good biosecurity, all bird owners should prevent contact between their birds and wild birds and report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to state/federal officials, either through their state veterinarian or through USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593.
- If you find three or more dead wild birds in a specific area within a two week period OR if you see live birds showing clinical signs of disease, please contact your [local Colorado Parks and Wildlife](#) office.

#### What happens to the ill birds?

- The affected flock has been euthanized and disposed of under the guidance of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Colorado Department of Agriculture.

#### What mental and behavioral health resources are available?

- Community members who are affected by this animal health emergency are to be aware of the possible impact on their mental health and to seek assistance if needed.
- Bird owners struggling with stress or anxiety around HPAI can contact [Colorado Crisis Services](#) by calling 1-844-494-TALK (8255) or texting TALK to 38255. Farmers and ranchers can receive a voucher for six free sessions with an ag-competent provider through the Colorado Agricultural Addiction and Mental Health Program ([campforhealth.com](http://campforhealth.com)).