

Talking Points: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1

February 12, 2025

Current Situation in Kentucky:

- On January 16, 2025, [CDC issued a Health Advisory](#) to encourage rapid subtyping for patients hospitalized with influenza A. The Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH) disseminated this communication to acute care facilities and health departments on January 21, 2025. KDPH continues to work with healthcare facilities to conduct enhanced surveillance of influenza A.
- The latest detections of avian influenza A(H5N1) in [wild birds in Kentucky](#) include waterfowl in Franklin County (January 2025), Rowan County (December 2024), and Henderson County (December 2024).
- There are currently no detections of avian influenza A(H5N1) in poultry, dairy cattle, or cats in Kentucky.
- There have not been any human cases of avian influenza A(H5N1) in Kentucky.

Current Situation in the United States:

- Avian influenza A(H5N1) is widespread in wild birds worldwide and causing outbreaks in poultry and U.S. dairy cows.
- As of February 12, 2025, [68 human cases of avian influenza A\(H5N1\)](#) have been reported in the United States, including one death. Nearly all identified cases had known exposure to infected animals. There is no evidence of human-to-human transmission of avian influenza A(H5N1).
- CDC considers the current public health risk to be low.

General Talking Points

What is Avian Influenza?

- Avian influenza (aka “Bird Flu”) is a type of influenza A virus that primarily affects birds but can occasionally infect humans and other animals.
- The virus is highly contagious among birds and can lead to severe illness and death in poultry and wild birds.
- Recently, avian Influenza has been detected in an increasing number of mammal species including dairy cattle and domestic cats.

How Does Avian Influenza Spread?

- Avian influenza virus spreads through direct contact with infected animals, their feces, saliva, or mucous, or contaminated surfaces and materials (e.g., feed, water, equipment).
- Humans can become infected through close contact with infected animals or their contaminated environments. Human-to-human transmission is extremely rare.

Risk to the Public:

- The current risk for the general public remains low.
- However, people with direct exposure to infected animals or their environments (e.g. people who work with birds, poultry, or cows, or who have recreational exposure to them) are at higher risk.
- Poultry, egg, and other animal products cooked to proper temperatures and pasteurized dairy products are safe for consumption.

What Are the Symptoms of Avian Influenza in Humans?

- If infected, symptoms may range from mild flu-like illness (conjunctivitis, fever, cough) to severe (difficulty breathing, pneumonia, death).
- Individuals should notify public health and seek medical attention if they experience flu-like symptoms after exposure to birds, animals or their environments.
- Laboratory testing is required to confirm diagnosis and differentiate between avian and seasonal influenza.
- Antiviral treatment (oseltamivir) for avian influenza is recommended as soon as possible and should not be delayed while awaiting laboratory results.

Protecting Yourself and Your Family:

The best way to protect yourself and your family from avian influenza is to avoid sources of exposure. Avoid direct contact with wild birds and other animals infected with or suspected to be infected with avian influenza viruses.

- 1. Avoid Contact with Wild Animals and Birds:**
 - Do not handle sick or dead animals or birds. Contact local wildlife or agriculture authorities for assistance. Keep pets away from sick or dead animals and their feces.
- 2. Practice Good Hygiene:**
 - Wash hands thoroughly after handling animals, birds, their waste, food, water, bedding, or equipment.
- 3. Safe Food Handling:**
 - Fully cook animal and poultry products to the correct internal temperature before consuming.
 - Avoid consuming unpasteurized raw milk or cheese from animals with suspected or confirmed infection.
- 4. Report Sick or Dead Animals and Birds:**
 - Notify the [Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources](#) (KDFWR) if you observe unusual illness or deaths in wild animals or birds. [Report](#) sick, injured, or dead birds to KDFWR.
 - For owners concerned about pets exposed to avian influenza, seek veterinary care for your pet.

What is Being Done in Kentucky?

- The KDPH is working closely with agriculture, wildlife, and federal partners to monitor the current avian influenza situation.
- The KDPH is monitoring persons exposed to infected birds or animals for symptoms of avian influenza during and 10-days after their last exposure.
- The KDPH is working with healthcare facilities to provide subtyping of influenza A samples from hospitalized patients.
- The KDPH, University of Kentucky and Breathitt Veterinary Diagnostic Labs have been conducting HPAI H5N1 testing in cats that test negative for rabies submission, since May 2024.
- The United States Department of Agriculture, Kentucky Department of Agriculture, and KDPH are collaborating on efforts in support of the [USDA National Milk Testing Strategy](#) and anticipate raw milk testing efforts in the Commonwealth in the near future.
- The CDC is monitoring for changes in the virus that may suggest that it can spread easier to and among humans, cause more severe disease, or be less responsive to antiviral medications or candidate vaccine viruses.

Where to Get More Information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections>