

# Health Information for People in Contact with Avian Influenza A(H5N1) Positive Wildlife

UPDATED DECEMBER 2024

## Human Health Risk

- Wild birds, including waterfowl, shorebirds, and seabirds, can carry influenza A (H5N1) viruses without showing symptoms. However, these viruses can cause illness and death in domestic poultry and certain species of wild birds including raptors and corvids.
- Influenza viruses that are severe in poultry are called highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). The HPAI virus currently circulating in wild birds and infecting domestic poultry is called H5N1.
- The H5N1 virus does not pose a risk to the public, nor is it a food safety risk, but there is a potential risk for those who work directly with infected birds.
- The risk to wildlife rehabilitation staff is low. However, in other parts of the world, people in direct contact with ill poultry have gotten sick from similar highly pathogenic H5 viruses.
- Infected birds shed HPAI viruses in their saliva, mucous, and feces. Human infections could happen when enough virus gets into a person's eyes, nose or mouth, or is inhaled. People with close or prolonged unprotected contact with infected birds or contaminated environments may be at greater risk of infection.

## Prevention Measures and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Limit contact with infected or possibly infected bird(s).
- Reduce activities that may cause aerosols (e.g., vacuuming or pressure washing) in areas with infected or suspect birds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth while working.
- Use PPE when working with bird species that may be at high risk of carrying or being ill from HPAI, including waterfowl, gulls, shorebirds, corvids, and raptors.
- PPE should include:
  - Washable or disposable long-sleeved coveralls or Tyvek suit
  - Rubber boots that can be disinfected or disposable plastic boots (replace if torn)
  - Washable or disposable head covering or Tyvek suit hood
  - Latex or nitrile gloves, but you may use cotton gloves underneath (replace if torn)
  - Goggles
  - N95 Respirator - fit tested is best
  - If an N95 is not available, use a KN95 or KN94 mask
  - People with beards should use a Powered Air Purifying Respiratory (PAPR)
- Do not eat, drink, smoke, use the bathroom, or leave the animal area while wearing PPE.

## HEALTH INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE IN CONTACT WITH AVIAN INFLUENZA A(H5N1) POSITIVE WILDLIFE

- Leave all contaminated clothing and equipment at work. If your rehabilitation facility is at your residence, keep your rehab work separate from your home life. Designate an area outside the animal area to put on and remove PPE and change clothes as you move from rehab work to your home.
- Disinfect any personal items (e.g., cell phones) that were brought into the animal area.

### Removing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- PPE should be donned (put on) and doffed (taken off) in a separate dirty to clean transition area. If using rubber boots, clean and disinfect the boots in the dirty area.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used to perform hand hygiene while removing PPE. Hands should be washed with soap and water once all PPE is removed and necessary items are disinfected.
- PPE should be removed in the following order:
  1. Remove soiled gloves and put on new ones or perform hand hygiene
  2. Remove goggles and respirator, and unzip coveralls. Dispose of respirator.
  3. Perform hand hygiene
  4. Start removing coverall by taking off hood and pulling arms out, rolling it down from the inside out
  5. Fully remove and dispose of the coverall
  6. Remove and dispose of gloves (if still wearing them)
  7. Perform hand hygiene
  8. Clean and disinfect reusable goggles and any personal items that were brought into the area.
  9. Wash hands with soap and water

### Symptom Monitoring of Wildlife Rehabilitation Staff with Exposure

- Rehabilitation facilities with birds that test positive for HPAI should call the Zoonotic Diseases Unit (ZDU) at 651-201-5414 for help assessing possible exposures.
- Facilities should monitor staff who had exposure to positive or suspect birds for respiratory illness or eye irritation/infection.
  - Daily symptom monitoring should continue for 10 days past the last exposure to the positive or suspect birds. If new exposures occur, monitoring should be extended based on the date of last exposure.
  - Concerning symptoms include cough, fever, sore throat, body aches, eye irritation/infection, or diarrhea.
  - Keep records of daily staff monitoring.
- If a staff member develops symptoms, please call ZDU at 651-201-5414. A ZDU epidemiologist will help assess the exposure and arrange for influenza testing, if needed.
- Having respiratory symptoms does not mean you are sick with avian influenza H5N1, as these symptoms are common in a variety of illnesses.

## HEALTH INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE IN CONTACT WITH AVIAN INFLUENZA A(H5N1) POSITIVE WILDLIFE

### Resources

#### Information on avian influenza

- [Recent Bird Flu Infections in U.S. Wild Birds and Poultry Pose a Low Risk to the Public \(www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/spotlights/2021-2022/bird-flu-poses-low-risk-public.htm\)](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/spotlights/2021-2022/bird-flu-poses-low-risk-public.htm).
- [Avian Influenza in Birds \(www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-in-birds.htm\)](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-in-birds.htm)
- [The Raptor Center Avian Influenza Resources \(raptor.umn.edu/about-us/our-research/HPAI\)](https://raptor.umn.edu/about-us/our-research/HPAI)

#### Information about protecting yourself

- [What to Know About Bird Flu \(www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/avianflu/Bird-Flu-Exposure-Handout.pdf\)](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/avianflu/Bird-Flu-Exposure-Handout.pdf)

If you have questions or develop respiratory symptoms after working with ill poultry, call 651-201-5414 and ask for the Zoonotic Diseases Unit.

Minnesota Department of Health  
Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Division  
625 Robert St N  
PO Box 64975  
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975  
651-201-5414  
[www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us)

12/20/2024

*To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414.*