

Influenza A(H5N1) Infection in Companion Animals - Guidance for Pet Owners

This document provides recommendations for pet owners who have a companion animal at home that is suspected or confirmed to be infected with avian influenza A(H5N1).

What is Avian Influenza A(H5N1)

- Avian influenza A(H5N1) is caused by influenza Type A virus (influenza A) commonly known as “bird flu”. This is a highly contagious viral disease affecting domestic and wild birds, dairy cattle, and other wild and domesticated animals, such as cats.
- Infections in companion animals can occur after contact with infected wild birds, bird droppings, dairy cattle or their body fluids, or clothing or equipment contaminated with H5N1 (boots or clothing worn while handling infected poultry or dairy cattle). Consumption of raw unpasteurized milk from infected dairy cattle or feeding of raw food can also potentially transmit H5N1.

Human Health Risk

- Influenza A(H5N1) virus is considered to be a low risk to the public, but there is a greater risk for those who handle and care for infected animals.
- Infected animals may be able to spread influenza A(H5N1) virus to people in their saliva, feces, milk, and other body fluids. Human infections can occur when the virus is inhaled or gets into a person’s eyes, nose, or mouth.
- It is important for pet owners to take prevention measures to decrease the risk of infection while caring for infected pets.

Prevention Measures at Home

- Companion animals suspected of or diagnosed with influenza A(H5N1) should be confined to a separate area in the home. If possible, keep the animal in a kennel in an area of the house away from other pets or family members.
 - Outdoor cats and dogs should not be allowed to roam and should be kept isolated in a garage or barn away from other animals.
- Physical contact should be limited to only necessary care. Do not allow your pet to lick you on the face and avoid any scratches or bites from them.
 - A mask, protective eyewear (goggles), gloves, and waterproof smock (or apron) should be worn while caring for your pet to prevent the virus from getting in your eyes, mouth, and nose, and limiting contamination of clothing. Keep all protective clothing in the same area the pet is confined in and remove it before leaving the area to prevent spread of germs to other pets, family members, or areas of the house.

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- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling the animal or being in their environment.
- Any areas that the animal had contact with prior to being confined should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected using a product approved to kill influenza viruses.
 - It is important to first remove any visible material (fur, dirt, feces) from surfaces and then spray or saturate the surface with the disinfectant. Be sure to read and follow the disinfectant label for how long to leave the product on the surface before wiping off.
 - Any bedding or soft toys should be laundered separately from other household laundry with normal detergent and then dried on high heat.
 - Any hard toys or bowls/dishes should be hand washed with dish soap, rinsed, and then disinfected using household bleach.
 - Alternatively, they can be placed in the dishwasher separate from other household items.
 - Any other toys or items that cannot be laundered or cleaned and disinfected should be thrown away.
- Elderly or young family members or adults that have weakened immune systems or are pregnant should avoid caring for sick pets.
- Continue to work with your veterinarian on a care plan for your pet.

Public Health Monitoring

- The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) will contact you to do a short interview about your interactions with your sick pet and to answer any questions that you may have. We will also enroll you in daily health monitoring which will include a quick text or phone call by MDH staff to check in and make sure that you are symptom free.
- Having respiratory symptoms does not mean you are sick with influenza A(H5N1), as these symptoms are common in a variety of illnesses.
- If you develop symptoms and you agree to it, MDH will help arrange for you to be tested.
- Contact MDH at 651-201-5414 and ask for the Zoonotic Diseases Unit for questions on human health risk from avian influenza and how to protect yourself.

Additional Resources

[Bird Flu in Pets and Other Animals | Bird Flu | CDC](#)

[Avian influenza in pets and backyard flocks | American Veterinary Medical Association \(avma.org\)](#)

[Q&A AI in cats \(woah.org\)](#)

[Influenza in Cats | Seasonal Influenza \(Flu\) | CDC](#)

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