



Avian Influenza

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza H5N1, also known as bird flu, is an influenza virus primarily affecting birds. It occurs naturally in wild aquatic birds and can infect domestic poultry through mucous, saliva, or feces. Human infections are rare but possible through close contact with infected animals.

What is the difference between Avian Influenza and Seasonal Influenza?

Avian influenza primarily affects birds, while seasonal influenza spreads among humans in predictable patterns. Seasonal flu vaccines do not protect against avian flu.

How does Avian Influenza spread?

The virus spreads through direct contact with infected birds, contact with contaminated surfaces, or inhaling airborne droplets from infected birds. Transmission occurs through fecal-oral and respiratory routes.

What animals can be infected?

Avian influenza primarily affects birds, including domestic poultry (chickens, turkeys, ducks) and wild birds (especially waterfowl and shorebirds). Wild birds can carry the virus without illness. Domestic poultry show severe symptoms with high mortality. The virus can also infect mammals such as cats, dogs, and other mammals, though this is less common.

Who is at risk for Avian Influenza?

The risk to the general public remains low. Individuals who have direct contact with infected birds or their droppings, or exposure to contaminated environments are at highest risk. These include poultry, dairy and other livestock farmers and workers, food processing workers handling raw milk and other potentially contaminated materials, wild animal facility workers, veterinarians and veterinarian staff, animal health responders, and hunters.

The elderly, young children, pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems may face greater risk of severe illness if infected.

How can I protect myself from Avian Influenza?

The best way to protect yourself from Avian Influenza is to minimize sources of exposure whenever possible. Infected birds spread the virus through their saliva, mucous, and feces, while infected mammals can transmit the virus in respiratory secretions and body fluids, such as cow milk.

As a general precaution, avoid direct contact with sick or dead wild birds, poultry, and other animals; observe them only from a safe distance. Avoid touching contaminated surfaces, bedding or animal litter materials from wild, domestic birds or other animals with confirmed or suspected Avian Influenza infection.

Do not consume unpasteurized milk or dairy products.

Are poultry and eggs safe to eat?

Properly cooked poultry and eggs are safe to consume when heated to an internal temperature of 165°F. Avoid raw or undercooked poultry products and practice proper food handling.

How can poultry workers protect themselves?

Workers should wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including N95 respirator, eye protection, disposable gloves, and protective clothing and boots. Regular hand hygiene is essential. Workers should change clothes before leaving facilities, avoid sharing equipment between farms, and maintain thorough cleaning and disinfection protocols for all equipment and vehicles.

What precautions should hunters take?

Hunters should avoid handling visibly sick or dead birds and use disposable gloves for handling. Avoid eating, drinking, or smoking while handling birds. Wash hands thoroughly after handling.

Should I get tested for Avian Influenza?

The risk to the general public remains low. If you develop flu like symptoms, please contact your primary care provider and inform them if you have had close contact with sick or deceased birds.

What are some key actions the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is taking?

- DPH is closely monitoring bird flu cases in both wild birds and farm animals, as well as in people at risk of exposure, particularly those working on farms or handling birds. This collaborative effort involves state and federal agencies to track the spread of the virus and ensure public safety.
- Public health leaders are working to ensure that individuals who are suspected of having bird flu can access timely testing and, if necessary, treatment. Early identification and response are crucial to preventing the spread of the disease.
- DPH is reminding residents that getting vaccinated against the flu and COVID-19 is recommended for everyone aged 6 months and older. These vaccinations help reduce the overall burden of illness.
- DPH is committed to keeping the public informed by regularly updating its webpages with the latest information about bird flu. This includes guidance on prevention, symptoms, and what to do if someone suspects exposure.

Through these measures, DPH is prioritizing the health and safety of the community while working to prevent further spread of the virus.

Who do I contact if I want to report sick, injured or dead birds?

Report sick, injured or dead wild birds to DNREC Wildlife Section:

- Monday through Friday, 8:00 am - 4:30 pm: 302-739-9912 or 302-735-3600 (Ext. 2)
- After hours/weekends/holidays: Access the online portal at dnrec.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/conservation/sick-dead-wildlife/reporting/

Notify Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA) via e-mail (poultry.health@delaware.gov) or phone (302-698-4507) if you find sick/injured/dead wild birds in your farm.

Commercial producers: Contact your contracting company when notice signs of disease.

Reference

Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology
24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

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