# Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) "Bird Flu"

**Frequently Asked Questions**

## What is HPAI (H5N1) or "Bird Flu"?

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) also known as a type of "Bird Flu" refers to the disease caused by infection with avian (bird) influenza (flu) Type A viruses. This bird flu is named highly pathogenic because this strain causes high mortality (death) in domestic poultry. These viruses naturally spread among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species, including recent infections among cattle. Bird flu viruses do not normally infect humans however, sporadic human infections with bird flu viruses have occurred.

## What animals can get HPAI?

HPAI is common in wild birds worldwide and is causing outbreaks in U.S. poultry and dairy cows. In recent years, HPAI has also infected some mammals, including but not limited to, wild or feral animals such as foxes, bears, and seals; stray or domestic animals such as cats and dogs; farmed animals such as mink and foxes, livestock such as goats and cows, and zoo animals such as tigers and leopards.

## How is HPAI spread to humans?

Human infections occur when the virus enters a person's eyes, nose, mouth or is inhaled. The current risk to the general public is low but may occur. People with close, unprotected contact with birds or animals that are contaminated with HPAI, are at greater risk of infection.

## Who is at higher risk of HPAI?

People who have occupational (work-related) or recreational (hobby-related) exposure to birds and animal species that may be contaminated with HPAI are at greater risk of infection.

Some occupations and recreational activities that put someone at greater risk include:

- Bird rehabilitation workers

- Bird or animal sanctuary workers

- Farmworkers (including dairy farms)

- Professionals who respond to bird flu outbreaks

- People who raise flocks of birds

- Livestock owners

- Hunters

## What are symptoms of HPAI in people?

Human infections with HPAI are rare, however, symptoms range from mild to severe and may include:

- Cough or sore throat

- Eye redness or eye discharge (conjunctivitis)

- Fatigue

- Fever

- Runny nose (rhinorrhea)

- Muscle pain (myalgia)

- Stiff joints

- Headache

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

- Altered mental status

- Seizures

## What can be done to prevent HPAI infections?

- Overall risk to the general public is low.

- People should avoid exposure to sick or dead animals.

- Avoid contact with wild birds or other animals infected/suspected to be infected.

- People should not cook or eat uncooked or undercooked food such as raw milk and raw cheeses from animals with expected or confirmed HPAI virus infection.

## What can be done to prevent HPAI infections in workers at higher risk?

- Avoid unprotected exposure to sick or dead animals.

- Wash hands right away with soap and water after touching birds and other animals.

- Wear [personal protective equipment (PPE)](#) when in direct or close contact (about six feet) with sick or dead animals including poultry, wild birds, cattle, or other animals, animal feces, carcasses, or materials potentially contaminated with HPAI virus infection.

- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, nose, or eyes after contact with birds or other animals.

- Receive education on and demonstrate an understanding of when to use PPE; what PPE is necessary; how to properly put on, use, take off, and get rid of PPE.

### Is milk available in the retail market still safe to drink?

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have indicated that based on the information we currently have, our commercial milk supply is safe because of both the pasteurization process and that milk from sick cows is being destroyed. It is not advised to consume raw milk as it has not been through this process. Based on information available, we do not know at this time if HPAI viruses can be transmitted through consumption of unpasteurized (raw) milk from infected cows. However, we have long known that raw milk can harbor dangerous microorganisms (germs) that can pose serious health risks to consumers. Additional information is available here: https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-index.html

### What about cheese sold at retail?

The FDA does not currently have concerns about the safety and availability of pasteurized milk products, including pasteurized cheese, sold nationwide. Pasteurization has continually proven to inactivate bacteria and viruses, like influenza viruses, in milk and milk products.

### Is it still safe to eat chicken, eggs and beef?

People should separate uncooked (raw) food from cooked foods and foods that won't be cooked. Cooking poultry, poultry products (including eggs) and beef to the appropriate internal temperature kills bacteria and viruses, including avian influenza viruses. Refer to this list of safe minimum internal temperatures.

### What if I think my poultry/livestock have HPAI?

If you think your poultry or livestock is infected with HPAI, contact your veterinarian and visit the New Jersey Department of Agriculture Avian Influenza Website. Change your clothing right away after being exposed to the animal and make sure to use proper personal protective equipment (PPE) if handling ill animals. Be sure to also wash your hands with soap and water.

### What is the treatment for HPAI in humans?

If you believe you are experiencing symptoms of HPAI, reach out to your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider will determine if you are eligible for antiviral medications.

### Where can I get more information?

- New Jersey Department of Health

- New Jersey Department of Agriculture

- CDC: Information on Bird Flu

- CDC: Raw Milk - Know the Raw Facts

- United States Department of Agriculture

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention