

AVIAN INFLUENZA (BIRD FLU)

Avian influenza, or bird flu, is a disease caused by a flu virus that primarily infects birds, including commercial poultry, backyard flocks, and wild birds. The virus can be highly contagious among birds but rarely infects people. There are several strains of bird flu viruses, of which H5N1 and H7N9 have caused the rare cases of human illness to date. Recently, an individual in Colorado who was working on a farm with infected poultry [tested positive](#) for the influenza A (H5N1) virus. To date, this is the only confirmed U.S. case of bird flu associated with the currently predominant group of H5 viruses.

I was exposed to a sick bird. How do I know if I have the bird flu?

Birds infected with avian influenza may show symptoms such as decreased appetite, decreased egg production, respiratory signs (nasal discharge, coughing, sneezing), loss of coordination, or sudden death. Although human infection is rare, human symptoms of bird flu can range in severity from no symptoms or mild flu-like symptoms to more severe illness such as pneumonia that requires hospitalization. Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny/stuffy nose
- Muscle/body aches
- Eye redness
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

How does the bird flu spread? Can humans become infected?

Bird flu can be passed from wild birds like turkeys, geese, and ducks, to farm-raised birds. The spread of bird flu from a bird to a human occurs when a person has contact with the saliva, feces, or nasal fluid of an infected bird. Contact can happen when directly handling both live and deceased birds, as well as having contact with contaminated surfaces. Some examples of surfaces and objects that can be contaminated with virus-carrying fluids are:

- Cages or other animal enclosures
- Cooking utensils and surfaces such as cutting boards
- Farming equipment and butchery utensils

It's rare that bird flu is passed from person to person. It cannot be passed through eating fully cooked poultry. The CDC has a useful [infographic](#) about how bird flu spreads.



For more information:

- **Colorado HELP hotline:** 1-877-462-2911
- **Colorado Department of Agriculture:** [Avian Influenza and County Map](#)
- **CDC:** [Avian Flu](#)
- **USGS (US Geological Survey):** [Map of Distribution of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in North America](#)

How do I prevent myself and others from becoming sick?

While the seasonal flu vaccine does not prevent bird flu in humans, it may prevent severe illness. Because of this, it is important to take other steps to prevent the spread. Some prevention techniques include:

- Avoid contact with wild and domestic birds (such as geese, ducks, turkeys, and chickens). This includes staying away from farms and markets where these animals could be sold.
- Be sure that any poultry products are cooked thoroughly, including eggs and blood.

- If your job requires contact with poultry, wear gloves and a face mask and wash your hands with soap and water after handling.
- If you become sick within 10 days of touching an infected or sick bird, contact a healthcare provider, begin isolating from other people in your household, and avoid going to work and/or school.
- If your doctor thinks you have the bird flu, antivirals may work as a treatment. See your doctor for more information.

How is the current H5N1 situation being handled?

The current strain of H5N1 is labeled as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) because it causes severe disease in poultry, not in humans. The CDC currently assesses this virus as a low risk to the public.

• **Commercial flocks:**

- The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) and CDA (Colorado Department of Agriculture) are monitoring all commercial flocks within the state.
- If H5N1 is detected, the CDA

and APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) will work with the facility to eliminate the disease.

• **Wild birds:**

- The USDA, DOI (Dept of Interior), and CPW (Colorado Parks and Wildlife) are responding to reports of sick wild birds.

• **Farms and backyard flocks:**

- If you observe birds with bird flu symptoms listed above, immediately notify:

- Colorado State University (CSU) Avian Health Hotline at (970) 297-4008 or
- APHIS at 1-866-536-7593.
- Please see the APHIS bio security information about the "[Defend the Flock Program.](#)"
- [CDA: HPAI Webinar](#)
- [HPAI for Backyard and Exhibition Poultry Producers Q&A Report](#)



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