



Information for Employers and Workers

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Primary Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection
Service (APHIS)*

Due to concerns surrounding H5N1 avian influenza and the potential for animal to human transmission, it is essential for employees who may encounter dead birds during their daily tasks to understand best practices for use of personal protective equipment (PPE), handling and disposal procedures, and post-exposure actions.

1. Background

Although highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (commonly known as the bird flu), has been a public health concern for years, recent developments have heightened media attention and public awareness. In 2024, 66 people in the United States were diagnosed with H5N1 bird flu resulting from animal to human exposures (there have been no cases of human-to-human exposure). In most cases, symptoms were mild. On January 6, 2025, however, a Louisiana resident died from their infection marking the first H5N1 bird flu death of the current outbreak in the United States.

The wild bird H5N1 genotype was found in both the Louisiana patient who died after exposure to a sick backyard poultry flock, and a Canadian teen who was hospitalized in November. It appears that this genotype could be more hazardous to humans and is also dangerous to other animals. California has reported a few house cat deaths in animals exposed to raw pet food and raw milk.

To date, there have been no known human cases of H5N1 in Massachusetts. That said, the disease is widespread amongst bird populations nation-wide, making it essential that safety measures are taken to prevent spread of this potentially deadly disease.

2. H5N1 Avian Influenza in Massachusetts

As of January 22, 2025, Massachusetts has reported several instances of avian influenza (H5N1) in both wild and domestic birds:

- **Plymouth:** Over 60 dead birds, including geese, swans, and ducks, were found at Billington Sea (a large, shallow, freshwater pond). Preliminary tests indicate a high suspicion of H5N1 avian influenza. Official confirmation is pending from specialized laboratories.
- **Essex County:** A non-commercial, mixed-species backyard flock tested positive for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). The affected birds were depopulated to prevent further spread.
- **Barnstable County:** HPAI was detected in a non-commercial backyard flock. The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) took measures to depopulate and dispose of the affected birds.

3. Recommended Guidance for Handling Dead Birds

The following recommendations are intended workers who handle **healthy** wild birds in areas where HPAI is NOT suspected. Even if employees are not actively working with birds as part of their daily job functions, the following provide good perspective for handling live or dead birds in **minimum risk** scenarios.

1. Work in well-ventilated areas if working indoors. When working outdoors, work upwind of wild birds to the extent practical to decrease the risk of inhaling aerosols such as dust, feathers, or dander.
2. Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves and protective eye wear or a face shield while handling wild birds (*see “Disposal of Gloves and Sample-Related Waste” below*).
3. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water (or with alcohol-based hand products if soap and water are not available).
4. Thoroughly clean equipment and surfaces that come in contact with wild birds. These should be cleaned with an approved disinfectant applied for the recommended amount of time. *See recommendations regarding appropriate disinfectants below.*
5. Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling birds and until hands have been washed with soap and water or if soap and water are not available, sanitized with alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

The following recommendations are intended for workers who handle **sick or dead** wild birds associated with a morbidity/mortality event, indicative of a **high-risk scenario**.

1. Follow the recommendations above and the basic guidelines for infection control, including how to put on and use, remove, disinfect, or dispose of personal protective equipment and clothing (*see “Disposal of Gloves and Sample-Related Waste” below*).
2. Wash hands frequently and disinfect exposed surfaces and field equipment between work sites (*see recommendations regarding appropriate disinfectants below*).
3. Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling birds and until hands have been washed or sanitized.

4. Wear coveralls, gloves, shoe covers, or boots that can be disinfected or discarded, a respirator (preferably a NIOSH N95 respirator/mask), and protective eyewear (goggles) or full-face shield.
5. Monitor your health for clinical signs of influenza infection during and for ten days after your last exposure to potentially HPAI virus-infected or exposed birds.
6. Contact your healthcare provider if you develop fever, flu-like symptoms, or conjunctivitis (eye inflammation). Inform them prior to arrival that you have potentially been exposed to HPAI.

Disinfectants

1. 70% ethanol solution allowed to air dry. Don't use higher than 70% ethanol as it evaporates too quickly and doesn't have the contact time needed to disinfect.
2. Benzalkonium chloride based commercial disinfectant allowed to dry.
3. 10% solution of household bleach for 10 min. Use within one week. A 20% solution of household bleach will remain effective for up to one month.

Additional Information: [EPA's Registered Antimicrobial Products Effective Against Avian Influenza \[List M\]](#)

Disposal of Gloves and Potentially Contaminated Waste

1. Gloves and miscellaneous materials from handling or disposing of dead birds may be combined into a re-sealable bag.
2. Use a spray bottle with 70% ethanol to disinfect waste or add 20 mL to a one-gallon re-sealable bag with the waste. Seal the bag and spray outside of bag with a 70% ethanol solution.
3. Shake bag to mix the ethanol solution and waste.
4. Throw away with regular trash.

4. Dead Bird Reporting tools

Workers are encouraged to report dead birds through the following online tools to help triage and manage reports effectively:

State Dead Bird Reporting System: [Report Observations of Dead Wild Birds](#)

Domestic Poultry/Bird Reporting Form: [Poultry Disease Reporting Form](#)

Additional Resources for Employers and Workers: Avian Bird Flu

For additional resources, visit the USDA HPAI site for recommendations on [“Defending the Flock”](#). *“USDA’s Defend the Flock education program offers free tools and resources to help everyone who works with or handles poultry follow proper biosecurity practices. These practices will help keep your birds healthy and reduce the risk of avian influenza and other infectious diseases. Biosecurity is everyone’s job.”*

Especially useful links on this site include:

Infographic: [Checklist for Equipment and Vehicles](#)

Infographic: [Checklist for Safe Disposal of Dead Birds](#)

Infographic: [Found a Dead Wild Bird? Here's What To Do Next](#)

Other Useful Links

OSHA.gov: [Avian Influenza - Overview](#)

OSHA.gov: [Avian Influenza - Control and Prevention](#)

CDC: [Interim Guidance for Employers to Reduce Exposure to Avian Influenza A Viruses for People Working with Animals](#)

CDC Infographic: [Information for Workers Exposed to H5N1 Bird Flu](#)

CDC Infographic: [Protect Yourself from H5N1 Bird Flu - What to do if you feel sick](#)

CDC Infographic: [Protect yourself from H5N1 Bird Flu - Use personal protective equipment safely in medium exposure settings](#)

USDA: [Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza](#)