

February 7, 2025

Considerations for Schools with Poultry, Backyard Bird Flock, and Livestock

SUMMARY

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and considerations for schools with poultry, backyard bird flock, and livestock to prevent and mitigate the spread of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5N1) virus. Human infections with H5 (Avian Influenza) are rare but can occur, usually after close contact with infected birds. Very rarely, human infections have happened after exposure to other infected animals. In 2024, an outbreak of H5N1 in cattle led to infection in humans.

DC Health is actively monitoring all types of influenza, including H5N1. At present there have been no reports of human infection with H5N1 in the District, and ongoing testing has yielded no positive results in animal samples. We continue to work with the CDC, USDA, FDA, and other state health departments to monitor people exposed to animals infected with H5N1 viruses.

Overall, the risk of H5N1 to the general public remains low.

BACKGROUND

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) A (H5N1) has been circulating among wild birds in the U.S. since 2022, leading to outbreaks in poultry, backyard flocks, and sporadic infections in mammals. As of February 7, 2025, 67 human cases of H5N1 have been confirmed. While the overall risk to the public remains low, individuals with occupational or recreational exposure to infected birds, cattle, or other animals face a higher risk and should take necessary precautions.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HPAI A (H5N1) VIRUS

In Animals

Infected birds in backyard flocks or as pets may show one or more of the following signs and symptoms:

- Sudden death with no prior signs
- Low energy or appetite
- Lack of coordination
- Diarrhea
- Purple discoloration or swelling of various body parts
- Reduced egg production or soft-shelled/misshapen eggs
- Nasal discharge, coughing, or sneezing

However, wild birds can also be infected without showing any signs or symptoms.

In Humans

Many symptoms of H5N1 closely resemble those of more common influenza strains (the flu).

- Cough
- Sore throat
- Fever or feeling feverish
- Rhinorrhea (dripping or running nose)
- Fatigue
- Myalgia (muscle aches and pains)
- Arthralgia (joint stiffness)
- Headache

However, H5N1 may also have eye redness or eye discharge, such as conjunctivitis. If you suspect you or someone in your school may have contracted H5N1, please contact your healthcare provider to obtain a medical evaluation.

SCHOOL NURSE/ HEALTH SUITE ACTIONS

If you suspect a student may have presented with H5N1:

- Quarantine student in health suite until parent/guardian can pick student up.
- Disinfect all areas the student has come into contact with.
- Recommend the parent/guardian contact their healthcare provider to obtain a medical evaluation.

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Avoid Contact with Sick or Dead Animals

- Avoid direct contact with sick or dead wild birds, poultry, and other animals and observe them only for a distance.
- Do not touch surfaces or materials (e.g., animal litter or bedding material) contaminated with saliva, mucus, or animal feces from wild or domestic birds or other animals with confirmed or suspected HPAI A H5N1 virus infection.
- Do not touch or consume raw milk or raw milk products.
- Wear recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) when in direct physical contact or during close exposure to sick or dead birds or other animals, carcasses, feces, unpasteurized (raw) milk, or litter from sick birds or other animals confirmed to be or potentially infected with HPAI A(H5N1) virus.

Handwashing

- Teach and reinforce proper handwashing techniques.
- Schools and other facilities should provide adequate handwashing supplies (e.g., soap, water, and paper towels) within easy reach of the user.
 - If soap and water are unavailable, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can be provided.
 - Store hand sanitizer up, away, and out of sight of younger children and allow their use with adult supervision for children under 6 years of age.

REPORTING

Any human patients with an exposure to an ill animal or signs and symptoms compatible with HPAI A (H5N1) virus infection should contact their healthcare provider immediately for a medical evaluation. Please report any suspected or confirmed human cases of HPAI A (H5N1) virus infection to DC Health at 844-493-2652.

Any animals with signs and symptoms compatible with HPAI A (H5N1) virus infection should be referred to a veterinarian or animal provider for a medical evaluation.

Unusual deaths or multiple (3 or more) sick birds should be reported to DC Health's Animal Services Division via email at animal.info@dc.gov or by phone at 202-535-2323.

RESOURCES

[American Veterinary Medical Association- Avian Influenza in Pets and Backyard Flocks](#)
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention- Avian Influenza in Birds: Causes and How It Spreads](#)
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention- Backyard Flock Owners: Protect Yourself from Bird Flu](#)
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention- Signs and Symptoms of Bird Flu in People](#)

Please visit the DC Health - Health Notices website (dchealth.dc.gov/page/health-notice) regularly for the most current information.

**Please contact the DC Health Division of Epidemiology-Disease Surveillance and Investigation at:
Phone: 844-493-2652 | Fax: (202) 442-8060 | Email: doh.epi@dc.gov**