

ADVISORY: Avian Influenza Outbreaks in Washington State



December 19, 2022

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

A strain of avian influenza virus (H5N1) has been detected in wild birds and domestic poultry in many parts of the U.S. and in Washington State. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife are monitoring positive avian influenza detections across the country.

Recently, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has seen an uptick in **reports of sick or dead waterfowl** in western Skagit County around Skagit Bay, as well as in northwestern Snohomish County, on Camano Island, and in Port Susan in Island County. Samples of deceased bird species from this area are being tested for avian influenza; the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus H5N1 strain is suspected. A similar outbreak was identified around Wiser Lake in Whatcom County.

Avian influenza has been confirmed in **raccoon, raptor, hawk, waterfowl, raven and crow** samples in Washington state, including samples from King and Pierce counties.

UW EH&S and other University personnel are coordinating with state and federal wildlife partners to monitor for and report sick or dead birds on UW campuses.

What is my risk?

Bird flu viruses are not easily transmissible from birds to people, and none of the HPAI strains circulating in North America have been identified as high risks to human health.

While the risk of human infection with HPAI viruses is considered low, human infections have occurred in other countries after close, prolonged, and unprotected contact with birds.

As a precaution, if you develop **flu-like symptoms** following contact with a sick bird:

- Seek care through your personal healthcare provider, and tell them about your contact with a sick bird.
- Contact your **local health department** if you live off campus.
- If you live on a UW campus, contact UW EH&S at (206) 543-7262 or ehsdept@uw.edu.

WHAT IS AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Avian influenza refers to the disease caused by infection with avian influenza Type A viruses. These viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds (ducks, geese, swans, gulls and terns, and shorebirds) worldwide and can infect poultry and other bird (and some animal) species. Avian influenza Type A viruses are classified into two categories: low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). LPAI viruses cause either no signs of disease or mild disease while HPAI can sicken and kill wild and domesticated birds such as chickens, ducks, and turkey.

Birds infected with HPAI may appear lethargic, unable to fly, and exhibit incoordination, wheezing, sneezing, vomiting, have diarrhea, or have secretions from their mouth or nostrils. Unfortunately, there is no supportive treatment for infected wild birds.

How is Avian Influenza spread?

Avian influenza Type A viruses are contagious among birds through saliva, nasal secretions, feces, and contaminated surfaces.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Apply the following protective actions to reduce the risk of contracting any wildlife disease:

- **Avoid unprotected contact with bird secretions or excrement.** Wear disposable gloves and immediately wash hands with soap and water or alcohol wipes if touching or cleaning bird feeders, surfaces or water contaminated with bird feces or saliva, or interacting with wild birds.
- **Observe wild birds from a distance.**
- **Avoid contact with sick, injured or dead wild birds.** DO NOT attempt to move sick birds to a veterinarian or rehabilitation center, or to your home, as this can spread the disease.
- **Avoid unprotected contact with sick or dead domestic birds or poultry.**
- **If you must move a sick bird or remove a dead bird** (e.g., to keep your pet away from it at home),
 - Wear [personal protective equipment](#) (PPE), like disposable gloves, boots, an N95 respirator if available, or if not available, a well-fitting facemask (e.g., a surgical mask), and eye protection.
 - UW personnel are required to use appropriate PPE when handling sick animals or removing dead animals. Visit the EH&S website for [resources](#) on selecting appropriate PPE for the work activity.
 - **Change your clothes**, immediately discard used PPE in the garbage, and **wash hands with soap and water** before eating, drinking or touching your face.
 - **If you must dispose of a dead bird**, wear PPE, double bag the carcass, and push it deep into the trash to keep scavengers away from it.

- **Clean and disinfect tools or work surfaces that have contacted birds, bird secretions or excrement.** Use the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) list of registered antimicrobial products with label claims for avian influenza](#). Carefully follow the directions on the label to for safe handling and use of the product.
- **Chicken, eggs and other poultry and poultry products are safe to eat** when properly handled and fully cooked. Be sure to [follow these tips for safe handling and preparation of food](#).
- **Prevent pets from touching wildlife carcasses or interacting with birds or wildlife.** [Dogs and other animals](#) can also become sick with avian influenza.

REPORT SIGHTINGS

At a University location:

- Report sick or dead wild birds on a UW campus promptly through the [EH&S Wildlife Reporting form](#), or email phdept@uw.edu or call (206) 543-7209 or (206) 616-1623.
- The University works with federal wildlife biologists and professional contractors to support safe and appropriate removal of sick, injured, or dead wildlife from campus locations.

Outside of the University:

- Report sick or dead wild birds promptly to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife using [this online form](#).
- Report sick or dead poultry or domestic birds suspected of avian influenza to the Washington State Department of Agriculture promptly by calling (800) 606-3056 or via [this online form](#).

RESOURCES

Visit the following resources for more information:

- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife. [Avian Influenza \(bird flu\) focus sheet](#).
- Center for Disease Control. [Bird Flu Current Situation Summary](#).
- United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). [2022 Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza](#).
- Washington State Department of Agriculture. [2022 Washington Bird Flu Detections](#).
- US Department of Labor. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. [Avian Influenza Control and Prevention](#).

Questions? Contact EH&S at (206) 543-7262 or phdept@uw.edu for more information.