

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Public Health Officials Offer Precautions to Protect Against Bird Flu

*Safeguards include avoiding raw milk and raw poultry; taking extra care with animals*

**RIVERSIDE, CA (January 29, 2025)** – Riverside University Health System (RUHS) - Public Health recommends precautions to prevent Avian influenza (bird flu) infection as commercial agriculture and wildlife exposures increase.

Bird flu, or Avian influenza, is a virus that is spreading through wild birds worldwide. It is causing outbreaks in poultry and U.S. dairy cows. In Riverside County, 23 dairy and poultry farms including one backyard flock have tested positive for bird flu. At this time no human cases have been identified in the county.

**Bird flu is spread from infected cows, birds and other animals to people in a variety of ways. These include:**

- By breathing in dust or droplets with the virus
- Touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands after touching contaminated surfaces or handling sick or dead animals or their environments
- Consuming raw unpasteurized milk or products

No person-to-person virus transmission has been detected in the United States. Higher-risk groups include people who work or interact with dairy cows, all types of poultry (including backyard flocks), cats or wildlife, especially wild birds.

“The overall risk to the general population is low,” said Riverside County Health Officer Dr. Geoffrey Leung. “Additional safety measures are being implemented at affected dairy and poultry farms, including ongoing monitoring for symptoms in farm workers, the use of personal protective equipment, and ensuring access to timely laboratory testing and treatment if and when needed.”

Public Health’s response to bird flu, in collaboration with the Office of the Agricultural Commissioner, Animal Services, and Environmental Health, includes enhanced biosecurity at local farms, securing personal protective equipment (PPE) and flu vaccines for farm workers, and ongoing health monitoring.

**Individuals who are at risk for exposure due to contact with livestock, backyard flocks, or wildlife should follow these prevention measures:**

- Wash hands immediately after coming in contact with animals or their environment and avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Use PPE when handling animals that could be infected with bird flu. PPE includes a fit-tested N95 respirator, eye protection, gloves, coveralls and boots or shoe covers.
- Wear dedicated clothing and footwear while working with animals; shower or change into new clothes after exposure.
- Work with animals outdoors or in well-ventilated indoor environments.

According to Leung, individuals should avoid drinking raw, unpasteurized milk and raw milk products, and make sure poultry and eggs are cooked to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees. Raw dairy, raw poultry and raw pet food should not be fed to pets. There is no evidence that humans or pets can get bird flu through pasteurized dairy or properly prepared poultry and eggs cooked to the correct temperature.

Individuals who believe they may have been exposed to infected animals should monitor themselves for symptoms for 10 days after their last exposure. Symptoms include eye redness (conjunctivitis), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, diarrhea, vomiting, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue, difficulty breathing and fever. Contact your healthcare provider if you develop symptoms, and share any exposure you may have had to sick animals. If the exposure happened at your worksite, notify your employer.

While there is no vaccine for bird flu, health experts recommend people get their seasonal flu vaccine. Seasonal flu vaccination will not prevent infection with Avian influenza viruses. However, it can reduce the risk of getting sick with human and bird flu viruses at the same time which could lead to a more severe or contagious disease.

To learn more about bird flu and how to protect yourself, visit: [www.ruhealth.org/avianflu](http://www.ruhealth.org/avianflu).

Poultry owners with flocks that have experienced any unusual/suspicious illness or deaths should call the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Sick Bird Hotline at: 866-922-BIRD (2473).

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### **About Riverside University Health System – Public Health**

*Riverside University Health System – Public Health (RUHS - PH) serves as Riverside County's public health department. RUHS-PH offers a range of services and programs to promote and protect the health of all county residents and visitors in service of the well-being of the community. RUHS includes the 439-bed Medical Center in Moreno Valley, Calif., 14 Community Health Centers across Riverside County, and Behavioral Health, which provides emergency and inpatient psychiatric care.*

Visit [www.ruhealth.org](http://www.ruhealth.org) to learn more.