

Frequently Asked Questions

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) Bird Flu

What is the A(H5N1) virus or H5 bird flu?

HPA1 A(H5N1) virus is a type of influenza virus that causes highly infectious and severe respiratory disease in birds. That is why it is called avian influenza or bird flu. It is causing outbreaks in poultry and dairy cows in the U.S. Although the current public health risk for the general public is low, the CDC is carefully watching the situation and working with states to monitor people with animal exposures.

What are the symptoms of A(H5N1) virus infection?

They range from no symptoms to mild, flu-like illness to severe illness that requires hospitalization. For example, the dairy workers infected in the U.S. reported mild illness, with the main symptoms being conjunctivitis or eye infection.

Some other common symptoms are consistent with the flu, according to the CDC, and include cough, sore throat, eye redness or discharge, fever or feeling feverish, runny nose, fatigue, muscle or joint pain, and headache. For moderate to severe illness symptoms can include shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, and altered mental state or seizures.

How long after exposure do symptoms appear?

People who are exposed should monitor themselves daily for signs and symptoms of new illness for up to 10 days after the last known exposure. The incubation period depends on the strain of the virus the dose, the route of exposure, and the species. The estimated incubation period for human infection with A(H5N1) virus is generally three to five days but has been reported to be as long as seven to 10 days.

How is A(H5N1) bird flu diagnosed?

The A(H5N1) virus infection in people cannot be diagnosed by clinical signs and symptoms alone. Laboratory testing is needed to confirm A(H5N1) virus infection in humans. Testing is usually done by a local or state Public Health Laboratory. As of July 26, 2024, no human cases of A(H5N1) have been reported in California.

Who is at risk of contracting A(H5N1) virus?

The risk of A(H5N1) virus infection is low for the general public in the U.S. But people who work with birds, poultry or cows, or have recreational exposure to them, are at higher risk.

How is A(H5N1) virus spread to humans?

People rarely get A(H5N1) virus infections, but when they do, it is most often acquired through close, prolonged, and unprotected contact—no gloves, protective wear, face masks, respirators, or eye protection—with infected birds or other animals.

Human infections with avian influenza A viruses can happen when enough virus gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth, or inhaled. This can happen when the virus is in the air in droplets or dust and a person breathes it in or when a person touches something that has the virus on it and then touches their mouth, eyes, or nose, according to the CDC.

What are infection prevention and control recommendations for A(H5N1)

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after contact with animals.
- Avoid contact with sick animals.
- Wear personal protective equipment if your job requires interacting with sick animals.

Is treatment available for A(H5N1) virus infections?

There is a Food and Drug Administration-approved antiviral treatment for seasonal flu that can be used for A(H5N1) virus infection. Antiviral treatment is recommended as soon as possible for outpatients and hospitalized patients who are suspected, probable, or confirmed cases of human infection with A(H5N1). Treatment should be discussed with your healthcare provider.

Is there a vaccine for the A(H5N1) virus?

No human vaccines for the prevention of HPAI A(H5N1) virus infection are currently available in the United States. Although seasonal influenza vaccines do not provide any protection against human infection with A(H5N1) viruses, an annual influenza vaccination is recommended.

Is it OK to drink milk?

The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has been sampling retail milk and other dairy products. To date, they have not found live, infectious virus in the products.

The CDC issued a Health Alert Network Health Advisory with recommendations that support only drinking pasteurized milk and eating dairy products made from pasteurized milk. Most of the nutritional benefits of drinking milk are available from pasteurized milk. It is important not to consume unpasteurized "raw" milk or products made from unpasteurized milk because it can contain bacteria or viruses, such as A(H5N1) virus, that can cause serious illness, hospitalization, or death.

Can I get A(H5N1) virus from eating poultry or eggs?

There is no evidence that the virus can be spread to humans through properly prepared food. Cooking poultry, eggs, and other animal products to the proper temperature and preventing cross-contamination between raw and cooked food are key to preventing any food safety hazard, including infection from the A(H5N1) virus, according to the FDA.

What should I do if I find a dead bird?

It is important to avoid contact with wild or domestic birds that appear ill or have died. If you do encounter a sick or dead bird, call to report it because wildlife agencies regularly investigate reports of sick or dead animals. This type of reporting can help with early detection of illnesses such as the bird flu, or West Nile virus. Call the WNV Call Center at 1-877-WNV-BIRD or file a report online. The WNV Call Center staff will tell you how to prepare the bird for pickup or to safely dispose of it.

Is it safe to travel to areas where cases of A(H5N1) virus have been reported?

At this time the CDC does not have any travel restrictions related to the bird flu to states or countries affected by avian influenza in wild birds, poultry, other animals, or people. But travelers to countries or states with bird-flu outbreaks in poultry or people should not visit poultry farms, bird markets, or other places where live poultry are raised, kept, or sold.

For travel alerts, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/panfluexercise/travel-warnings.html>

When traveling—just as at home—do not eat raw or undercooked poultry products and wash your hands after touching uncooked poultry. It is important to contact a healthcare provider if you become sick during or after travel.