

Date: April 15, 2024

Re: Highly pathogenic avian influenza diagnosed in a person in the United States

Current Situation:

On April 1, 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that a person in Texas tested positive for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) virus, also known as “H5N1 bird flu”. This person had exposure to dairy cattle in Texas presumed to be infected with the HPAI A(H5N1) virus. **This infection does not change the H5N1 bird flu human health risk assessment for the US general public, which CDC considers to be low.** However, because influenza viruses constantly change, continued surveillance and preparedness efforts are critical, and CDC is taking measures in case the public health risk assessment changes. This is a developing situation, and CDC will share additional updates as new relevant information becomes available.

We hope that the following Q&A will help answer questions you may get from colleagues or customers.

Are other people infected?

Not at this time; only one person has tested positive. CDC is working with state health departments to continue to monitor workers who may have been in contact with infected or potentially infected birds/animals and test those people who develop symptoms. This is the second person reported to have tested positive for influenza A(H5N1) viruses in the United States. A previous human case occurred in 2022 in Colorado. Human infections with avian influenza A viruses, including A(H5N1) viruses, are uncommon but have occurred sporadically worldwide.

Who is at risk?

According to the CDC, the general public in the US has a low risk of HPAI A(H5N1). People with close or prolonged, unprotected exposures (meaning not using respiratory or eye protection) to infected birds or other animals (including livestock), or to environments contaminated by infected birds or other animals, are at greater risk of infection. Most human infections with H5N1 virus have occurred after unprotected exposures to sick or dead infected poultry. There is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission. It is important to remember that risk depends on exposure, and people with more exposure are at greater risk of infection.

Is Avian Influenza common in the US?

HPAI bird flu is widespread among wild birds in the US and globally and has caused sporadic infections in mammals. Virus detections in wild birds have been reported in 50 states or territories, and outbreaks in commercial poultry or backyard bird flocks associated with high bird

mortality have been reported in 48 states since February 2022. HPAI in dairy cows was first reported in Texas and Kansas by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on March 25, 2024.

Is the food supply safe?

Milk:

According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and USDA there are no concerns with the safety of the commercial milk supply at this time because products are pasteurized before entering the market. Dairies are required to send only milk from healthy animals into processing for human consumption. In addition, pasteurization has continually proven to inactivate bacteria and viruses, like influenza, in milk.

Unpasteurized milk from sick cattle collected from two dairy farms in Kansas and one in Texas has tested positive for HPAI. FDA's longstanding position is that unpasteurized, raw milk can harbor dangerous microorganisms that can pose serious health risks to consumers, and FDA is reminding consumers of the risk associated with raw milk consumption, and products made from raw milk such as raw milk cheeses, in light of the HPAI detections.

Poultry and Eggs:

Poultry and eggs that are properly prepared and cooked are safe to eat. In addition to proper processing, the proper handling and cooking of poultry products provides protection from viruses and bacteria, including avian influenza.

The chance of infected poultry entering the food chain is extremely low. As part of the USDA highly pathogenic avian influenza response plan, infected birds do not enter the food supply. Additionally, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspection program personnel are assigned to every federally inspected meat, poultry and egg product plant in America. All poultry products for public consumption are inspected for signs of disease both before and after processing. USDA has other safeguards in place, such as testing of flocks and monitoring for any signs of disease.

However, people are reminded that they should not prepare or eat uncooked or undercooked food from animals with confirmed or suspected HPAI A(H5N1) virus infection.

What should a person do if they suspect they may have Avian Influenza?

Persons who develop any illness symptoms after exposure to HPAI A(H5N1) virus infected birds or other animals should seek prompt medical evaluation for possible influenza testing and antiviral treatment by their clinician or public health department. Human infections with avian influenza A viruses can happen when enough virus gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth or is inhaled. People with close or prolonged unprotected contact with infected birds or animals or their contaminated environments are at greater risk of infection. Illnesses in people from HPAI A(H5N1) virus infections have ranged from mild (e.g., upper respiratory symptoms) to severe illness (e.g., pneumonia, multi-organ failure) resulting in death. Signs and symptoms include flu-like symptoms such as eye redness (consistent with conjunctivitis) and acute respiratory illness. Gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhea have also been reported in some patients. No human vaccines for prevention of HPAI A(H5N1) virus infection are currently available in the US. Seasonal

influenza vaccines do not provide any protection against human infection with HPAI A(H5N1) viruses.

What exactly is Avian Influenza?

According to the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS):

Avian influenza, or "bird flu," is a contagious viral disease of domestic and wild birds. It's a major threat to the poultry industry, animal health, trade, and the economy worldwide. Caused by influenza type A viruses, the disease varies in severity depending on the strain and species affected. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) strains are deadly to domestic poultry and can wipe out entire flocks within a matter of days. Low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI) strains typically cause few or no signs of illness. They occur naturally in wild birds around the world. However, some LPAI strains can become highly pathogenic in poultry.

The global occurrence of HPAI A(H5N1) viruses in wild birds has resulted in outbreaks among commercial poultry, backyard bird flocks, and spread to infect wild terrestrial and marine mammals, as well as domesticated animals. Sporadic human infections with HPAI A(H5N1) virus have been reported in 23 countries since 1997 but only a small number of H5N1 cases have been reported in humans since 2022.

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Update: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza was detected in a dairy herd in North Carolina. HPAI was previously detected in dairy herds in Texas, Kansas, Michigan, Idaho, New Mexico, and Ohio. The NC Department of Health and Human Services stated that they believe the overall risk to the general public remains low. There are no concerns with the safety of the commercial milk supply at this time because products are pasteurized before entering the market. People should not consume or prepare food with raw or unpasteurized milk.

USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) confirmed the detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza in a dairy cattle herd in South Dakota. USDA reiterated that the commercial milk supply remains safe.

Sources:

[Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A \(H5N1\) Virus Infection Reported in a Person in the U.S. | CDC Online Newsroom | CDC](#)

[H5N1 Bird Flu: Current Situation Summary | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Avian Influenza in Birds | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Virus in Animals: Interim Recommendations for Prevention, Monitoring, and Public Health Investigations | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Avian Influenza | Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

[Reported Human Infections with Avian Influenza A Viruses | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

USDA Q&A: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/avian-influenza-food-safety-qa.pdf>

[Influenza Type A Viruses | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Statement: Avian Flu Detected in North Carolina Dairy Herd | NCDHHS](#)

[South Dakota Confirms Avian Flu in Dairy Herd](#)