

## H5N1 Bird Flu: Information for Workers

### What is H5N1 Bird Flu?

H5N1 bird flu, also called avian flu or avian influenza, refers to infections caused by the avian influenza Type A virus. The first instances of bird flu were reported in the late 1990s. Since then, several variants have been reported around the world in wild birds. In 2024, the H5N1 virus has been detected in U.S. dairy cows for the first time. There have been 13 cases of transmission to U.S. dairy and poultry workers to date since April 2024 (August 12, 2024). Although the rate of transmission to humans is currently low and all cases thus far have been people with direct contact with infected animals, the CDC is monitoring infection rates and recommends protections for those exposed to potentially infected animals.

### Who is at risk?

- Poultry, dairy, and other farm workers coming into contact with sick or dead animals including wild birds, poultry, other domesticated birds, cows, and other animals.
- Healthcare workers treating and caring for infected patients.

### What are the symptoms?

Bird flu symptoms range from mild to severe and can include:

- Fever (Temperature of 100°F [37.8°C] or greater) or feeling feverish/chills
- Sore Throat
- Headaches
- Cough
- Eyes tearing, redness, irritation
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Diarrhea
- Muscle or body aches

### How can workers become infected?

- Research is ongoing, and information is subject to change. As of 7/30/2024, it is believed that people can become infected from cows or other animals in the following ways:

- Indirect contact such as touching a substance (feces, water infected with animal waste, etc) that has been contaminated with the virus and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- A liquid contaminated with the virus splashes into your eyes (such as raw cow's milk from an infected cow).
- Eating, drinking or inhaling droplets contaminated with the virus.

### Is there a vaccine?

As of now, there are no widely available vaccines that specifically target H5N1, but that could soon change. The CDC is currently working on developing a vaccine that specifically targets H5N1. The seasonal flu vaccine does not protect people against infection from the bird flu. However, the seasonal flu vaccine does reduce the risk of becoming ill with human and bird flu viruses at the same time. This is especially important for workers with exposure to infected or potentially infected birds or other animals.

### Is there specific treatment for the virus?

There are antiviral medications approved to treat influenza, including H5N1. It is recommended that antiviral treatment begin as soon as symptoms occur. If you get sick after being in close contact with infected or potentially infected birds, cows, or other animals, contact your state or local health department and a health care provider right away.

### How can I protect myself at work?

- When possible, avoid direct contact with sick or dead birds, poultry, cows, or other animals.
- Dairy, poultry, and other workers in direct/close contact with sick or dead birds, poultry, cows, and other animals, should wear personal protective equipment (PPE). See below for more information on necessary PPE precautions.
- Do not touch or consume raw milk or raw milk products, especially from animals with confirmed or suspected avian influenza A virus infection.



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- Follow reputable sources of health information, including NYSDOH, CDC, and your local county health department.

### **Do I need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE?)**

Dairy, poultry, and other workers in direct/close contact with sick or dead birds, poultry and other animals should wear personal protective equipment (PPE). It is the employer's responsibility to conduct a hazard assessment of the workplace and of the workers' tasks (29 CFR 1910.132(d)). The need for PPE is determined based on the hazard assessment. If PPE is deemed necessary, it is the employer's responsibility to provide it to the employee at no cost (29 CFR 1910.132(h), as well as to provide training on how to use the PPE correctly (29 CFR 1910.132(f)).

The CDC recommends PPE when in contact with or around dairy cows, raw milk, other animals, or surfaces and other items that might be contaminated with virus. Wash your hands with soap and water, then put on PPE in this order:

1. Fluid-resistant coveralls
2. Waterproof apron
3. NIOSH Approved® Respirator (e.g., N95® filtering facepiece respirator or elastomeric half-mask respirator)
4. Properly fitted unvented or indirectly vented safety goggles or face shield
5. Head cover or hair cover
6. Gloves
7. Boots

Workers at risk of exposure should be fully trained on how to properly wear, use, and safely remove, and reuse/dispose of PPE.

### The CDC recommends the following best practices while wearing PPE:

- Use separate designated clean areas, one for putting on PPE and one for taking off PPE.
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose after touching any contaminated material.
- Do not eat, drink, smoke, vape, chew gum, dip tobacco, or use the bathroom in PPE.

### Follow these steps to safely remove PPE:

1. Remove the apron, if worn
2. Clean and disinfect your boots
3. Remove your boots
4. Remove coveralls
5. Remove gloves
6. Wash your hands with soap and water or, if soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub
7. Remove head cover or hair cover
8. Remove goggles or face shield and then remove respirator
9. Wash your hands again with soap and water or, if soap and water are not available, use an alcohol based hand rub

### After removing PPE:

- Shower at the end of the work shift.
- Leave all contaminated clothing and equipment at work.
- Watch for symptoms of illness while you are working with potentially sick animals or materials. Continue watching for symptoms for 10 days after finishing working. If you get sick, tell your supervisor, and talk with a doctor.

### Reusable and disposable PPE:

While removing PPE, dispose of all disposable PPE appropriately and set aside reusable PPE. Clean and disinfect reusable PPE after every use.

### **Is it safe to consume chicken, chicken eggs, and dairy milk?**

Cooking poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165°F kills bacteria and viruses, including the avian influenza A virus (H5N1). If drinking dairy milk, choose dairy products that are pasteurized. that are pasteurized. The



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process of pasteurization kills bacteria and viruses, including any influenza viruses that may be present in the milk.

### What should I do if I feel sick?

- Do not come into work.
- Under NYC's Paid Sick Leave Law (which is applicable to union, non-union, and undocumented workers), you are guaranteed up to 40 hours of sick leave per year. You might have more sick time under your union contract or employer's policy.
- You do not need a doctor's note until you are out for 3 or more consecutive days.
- See your healthcare provider – if you don't have a provider or health insurance, visit a public health clinic near you.

### What should I do if I've been exposed and have symptoms of bird flu?

You should talk to your state/local health department and healthcare provider for current guidance on isolation, infection control, and treatment. People with bird flu should isolate for 10 days after their last exposure to an infected/potentially infected animal or their byproducts.

### Who can I contact for more information?

- **Centers for Disease Control:**
  - **English/Spanish** 800-232-4636
  - **Other Languages** 877-696-6775
- **NYS Department of Health-** [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov)

### Sources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC]. (2024)
2. Occupational Safety & Health Administration [OSHA]. (2024)
3. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH]. (2024)
4. Mallapaty, S. (2024, July 12). *Bird flu could become a human pandemic. how are countries preparing?*. Nature News.
5. Hetter, K. (2024, April 11). *Is it safe to drink milk and eat chicken? What precautions to take during the bird flu outbreak.* CNN.