

AVIAN INFLUENZA



This focus sheet summarizes recent avian influenza activity, ways to stay healthy, and how to report dead or sick wildlife.

Avian influenza (also known as “bird flu”) is caused by viruses that naturally occur in wild aquatic birds. These viruses can spread between bird species, sometimes other animals, and rarely to humans.

RECENT AVIAN INFLUENZA ACTIVITY

As of April 2025, Avian Influenza viruses have caused outbreaks in several animal species and some people.

- Influenza virus H5N1 is widespread in wild birds globally and has caused outbreaks in U.S. backyard and commercial poultry.
- Another avian influenza [virus, H7N9](#), was found in commercial poultry.
- H5N1 has caused infections in [wild and domestic mammals](#) (including dairy cows) and is currently circulating in Washington state.
- Some dairy and poultry farm workers have become sick with avian influenza. In Washington state, this was from contact with sick animals at poultry farm and culling operations.

Health departments, labs, and hospitals [monitor for seasonal and new influenza viruses](#) in people.

[Federal](#) and state [wildlife](#) and [agriculture](#) departments monitor wild and domestic animals for circulating flu viruses, provide safety education, [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#), and outbreak response.



WHAT DOES ILLNESS LOOK LIKE?

Infected animals may be wheezing, sneezing, vomiting, appear tired, move in an uncoordinated way, have runny eyes or nose, or diarrhea.

Infected people may have eye redness and [flu-like symptoms](#).

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

Avian influenza viruses spread through exposure to a **sick animal's body fluids (including milk), saliva or feces** or contact with surfaces a sick animal has touched.

WHAT IS MY RISK FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Risk to the general public is currently low. Infections in people are rare. Person-to-person virus transmission has not been reported to date.

Infection risk increases with contact with sick animals.

If you develop [flu-like symptoms](#) after contact with a sick or dead animal:

- Seek care from your healthcare provider and tell them about your animal contact.
- 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.



WAYS TO STAY HEALTHY



ENJOY FROM A DISTANCE

Never touch wildlife; they know best how to care for themselves.

Hold off putting up backyard feeders. Wildlife interacting at feeding areas can spread disease and attract pests. Read more about [why not to feed wildlife](#).

AVOID CONTACT WITH WILDLIFE

Wear disposable gloves and immediately wash hands with soap and water after touching surfaces or water contaminated with wildlife feces or saliva.

- UW personnel are required to use task appropriate [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) for work around wildlife and their secretions.

Clean and disinfect tools that have touched wildlife or their body fluids. Use:

- a 10% bleach solution (Mix 1 part household bleach with 9 parts water); **or**
- a [product effective against avian influenza](#). Follow label directions for safe handling and use.

If you must move a sick or dead bird:

- **Wear PPE** including disposable gloves, rubber boots, respiratory and eye protection.
- **Use a tool if possible.** Avoid stirring up waste/dust.
- **Double bag a dead bird** and place it deep in the trash to keep scavengers from it.
- **Discard or disinfect used PPE.** Keep reusable PPE in a dedicated area outside of your home.
- **Wash hands with** soap and water before eating/drinking or touching your face.

REPORT SICK OR DEAD WILDLIFE

At a University location:

- Use the [EH&S Wildlife Reporting form](#) or call (206) 543-7262.

Outside of the University:

- **Wild birds:** Use the Washington State Dept. of Fish and Wildlife [online form](#).
- **Poultry or domestic birds:** Use the Washington State Department of Agriculture [online form](#) or call (800) 606-3056.

FULLY COOKED EGGS AND MEAT ARE SAFE

Use [safe handling and food preparation practices](#).

Steer clear of raw milks/cheeses and undercooked animal products. Refrigeration and freezing does not inactivate avian influenza.

PROTECT YOUR PETS AND BACKYARD BIRDS

Avoid giving pets raw milks and meats. Some raw pet foods have caused illness and been [recalled](#).

Prevent pets and flocks from interacting with wildlife (dead or alive) and their nests. [Dogs, cats, and other animals](#) can become sick with bird flu.

