

Know the FACTS

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), also known as bird flu, is a virus that mainly affects wild birds but also can spread to poultry (primarily chickens) and other animals. It is caused by avian influenza Type A viruses. Though bird flu rarely infects humans, people can get sick if they come into contact with infected birds or animals, such as poultry or cattle.

What is bird flu?

Bird flu is a contagious viral disease that causes what humans know as the flu. Bird flu is caused by infection with avian influenza Type A viruses such as H5N1 and H7N9. These viruses spread naturally in wild aquatic birds, poultry and other animal species such as dairy cattle.



How does bird flu spread?

Infected birds can spread the virus through their saliva, mucus and feces. Some other animals might carry the virus in their respiratory secretions, organs, blood, or other bodily fluids — even in their milk. Although bird flu infections in humans are uncommon, they can occur if enough of the virus enters a person's eyes, nose or mouth or is breathed in. There currently is no evidence that a person infected with bird flu can infect someone else.

Who is at risk?

People who spend a lot of time around infected animals without proper protection like masks and goggles may be at greater risk of bird flu infection. Poultry producers or processors, veterinarians, farmers, ranchers, people who raise backyard poultry or work in bird rehabilitation centers, and other livestock handlers may be at greater risk of contracting bird flu, as they frequently come into contact with animals that can be sick with it.

How can I protect myself from bird flu?

Generally, the risk of humans contracting bird flu is low. The best way to protect against contracting bird flu is to avoid direct contact with wild birds, sick or dead poultry, and other animals such as cows. Bird owners or people who have backyard flocks should practice good personal hygiene and prevent contact between their flocks and wild birds.

Can bird flu spread through food products?

You cannot contract bird flu from consuming fully cooked animal products such as meat or eggs. These fully cooked items from chickens, turkeys, ducks or livestock are safe to consume no matter if they came from wild or domestic animals. There is no evidence to suggest that bird flu can be transmitted through pasteurized dairy products. However, since the virus can survive in bodily fluids, including in an infected animal's milk, **it is important to avoid drinking raw or unpasteurized milk.**

Get more facts.

Find more information about bird flu from the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control at cdc.gov/bird-flu.



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