

# Avian Influenza Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for People with Kidney Diseases



## What Is Bird Flu?

Avian influenza A H5 (also known as “bird flu”) is a viral infection causing disease worldwide in wild birds. It is causing outbreaks in U.S. poultry and dairy cattle.



## Causes

Avian influenza A viruses, including H5N1, have been detected in more than 100 different species of wild birds around the world.<sup>4</sup> These viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and animal species (e.g., dairy cattle, cats).<sup>1</sup>



## How Is Avian Influenza A Transmitted Between Animals?

- Infected birds shed avian influenza A in their saliva, mucous, and feces and susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with the virus.
- Other animals may shed avian influenza A in their respiratory secretions and other bodily fluids.
- Susceptible birds and other animals can become infected through direct contact with the infected animal and/or by contact with surfaces that are contaminated with viruses from the infected animal.<sup>2</sup>



## What About Domesticated Birds?

Domesticated birds (e.g., chicken, turkeys, ducks, etc.) may become infected with avian influenza A viruses through direct contact with infected wild birds, infected poultry, or through contact with contaminated surfaces. The concern is, once introduced, the virus can move swiftly through a flock, causing substantial illness and death.<sup>4</sup>



## How Are Cows Getting Infected With Bird Flu?

Cows can be infected with bird flu via the movement of livestock from farm to farm, movement of contaminated equipment from farm to farm, and close geographic proximity to infected animals.<sup>3</sup> Reports of these sporadic infections in mammals have occurred globally amid widespread outbreaks of bird flu infection in wild birds and poultry.



## What About Cows In The United States?

A multistate outbreak of bird flu in dairy cows was first reported in March of 2024. This is the first time that these bird flu viruses have been found in cows.

<sup>1</sup>United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. [High Pathogenic Avian Influenza Detections in Mammals](#). U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d., Accessed 11 Feb. 2025.

<sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Avian Influenza Current Situation Summary](#). U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d., Accessed 11 Feb. 2025.

<sup>3</sup>United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) in Livestock](#). U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d., Accessed 11 Feb. 2025.

<sup>4</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [“Avian Influenza \(Bird Flu\) in Birds.” CDC](#). U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 17 Jan. 2023, Accessed 11 Feb. 2025.



## Can People Get Avian Influenza A?

Currently, most people who have gotten sick with avian influenza A H5 have become ill due to exposure to infected animals. The first infected person in the US was reported on April 1, 2024, in Texas; the person was presumed to have been infected after exposure to dairy cows. As of February 14, 2025, 68 human cases of influenza A H5 have been reported in this U.S. To date, there has not been human-to-human transmission but there is concern that the virus may change, leading to human-to-human transmission.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 900 people were infected with avian influenza A between 2003 and 2024. Half of those infected died; the majority of those who died were in Egypt, Indonesia, and Vietnam. To date, most people infected in the US have had mild disease. The first death in the US attributed to H5N1 was reported in January 2025.<sup>5</sup>



## How Do I Protect Myself?

The best protection is to avoid direct contact with sick or dead birds. Follow all recommended actions to protect yourself and employ preventative strategies to reduce the spread of viruses on surfaces when handling animals and animal products.

If you are traveling to a place where bird flu is spreading, avoid poultry farms and bird markets if possible. Cook food fully and wash hands with soap and water after handling food and animals.

People can take actions to further lower the risk of getting bird flu in many ways.

- **Avoid contact with animals who are sick or may be sick.** Keep wild or domestic birds at a distance to avoid any germs they may carry.
- **Wear eye, nose, and mouth protective gear.** Flu viruses get in the body through the mouth, nose, or eyes. Wear eye protection, a face mask, and gloves to help keep the virus out if you're in an area where it might be present.
- **Wash your hands with soap and water.** This is especially important after touching animals or surfaces that may be dirty with animal mucus, saliva, or stool. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are an option **IF** the hands are not visibly dirty.



## What Do I Do If I Find A Dead Bird?

Report to your state veterinarian or call the toll-free USDA number 1-866-536-7593.



## What Are The Symptoms Of Avian Influenza A?

Bird flu symptoms can be mild to serious in a person. Symptoms typically show up within seven days of contact with the virus but can take as long as two weeks. All flu virus types have similar symptoms. If you have symptoms of influenza, see your doctor about being tested. If you test positive for influenza A, you may need an additional test to check for H5. Tell your doctor if you have had an exposure that could put you at risk for avian influenza. Common symptoms of avian influenza are similar to seasonal flu and include fever, shortness of breath, pink eye, nausea and vomiting, and diarrhea.



## What If I Am Exposed?

Call your health care provider right away and tell them you have had an exposure. They may prescribe anti-viral medication.

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<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "[CDC Confirms H5N1 Bird Flu Death in the United States.](#)" *CDC*, 6 Jan. 2025, Accessed 11 Feb. 2025.



## What About Eating Chicken?

Eating uncooked or undercooked poultry or beef can expose you to a variety of germs that make you sick. While there is currently no evidence that anyone in the US has gotten infected with avian influenza A after eating properly handled and cooked poultry products, uncooked poultry and poultry products may have been the source of a small number of avian influenza A in people in Southeast Asia.

- **Avoid spreading germs in the kitchen.** Use hot, soapy water to wash all surfaces that have come into contact with raw poultry, meat, seafood, or eggs.
- **Cook food fully.** Cook chicken until it reaches an internal minimum temperature of 165 F (74 C). Cook eggs until the white and yolk are firm. Egg dishes, such as quiche, should reach 160 F (71 C). Cook beef to 145 F (63 C) and let it rest for 3 minutes. Cook ground beef to 160 F (71 C).
- **Avoid raw dairy products.** Dairy milk that is heated to kill germs is called pasteurized. In the U.S., dairy milk and foods made with dairy indicate on the Nutrition Facts label if the milk is pasteurized. Raw milk isn't pasteurized, so it is more likely to make you sick.



## Is My Cat At Risk For Avian Influenza?

Since March 2024, dozens of cats have been infected with avian influenza, including barn and feral cats, indoor cats, and big cats in zoos and in the wild. Cats appear to be particularly susceptible to severe illness from the virus. They become infected through unpasteurized milk and raw or undercooked meat (e.g., poultry), exposure to infected wild birds or poultry, or exposure to infected livestock and their environment. The risk of cat-to-human transmission is considered extremely low. Follow tips for keeping your cat safe from avian influenza.<sup>6</sup>



## Is There A Vaccine?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends annual flu vaccination for everyone age 6 months or older. This vaccine doesn't prevent bird flu, but the seasonal flu vaccine can help you avoid having two flu viruses at the same time. Vaccines to protect against avian influenza A are in development.



## Should I Be Concerned As A Patient With Kidney Disease?

People with kidney diseases are particularly vulnerable to severe disease from any type of influenza. It is important to follow all the guidelines to protect yourself and stay up-to-date on all recommended vaccines.

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<sup>6</sup> American Veterinary Medical Association. Avian Influenza H5N1 in Cats. AVMA Website. Published April 28, 2022. Accessed March 11, 2025 <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-health/avian-influenza/avian-influenza-h5n1-cats>.