

FAQs about Avian Influenza

What is avian influenza (bird flu)?

Avian influenza is a virus that usually affects only birds. It circulates among the wild bird population and, like other flu viruses, can change or mutate. Avian influenza can affect a wide variety of birds, including migratory waterfowl and poultry. Each year, birds experience a flu season just like humans and, as with people, some forms of the flu are worse than others.

Are all “bird flus” the same?

The avian influenza virus can be configured into more than 150 strains, as determined by the DNA-level combinations of “H” and “N.” For example, the virus may be classified as H1N2, H2N2 or H7N2. Strains referred to as “highly pathogenic” are more deadly to poultry and wild birds.

My backyard poultry have died/appear ill, what do I do?

To report dead poultry call the USDA Healthy Birds hotline at: 866-536-7593.

What are clinical signs of highly pathogenic avian influenza?

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production and/or soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, combs and legs
- Nasal discharge, coughing, sneezing
- Incoordination
- Diarrhea

I found a dead wild bird in my yard. What do I do?

Five or more dead wild birds found in one area should be reported to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) at: 812-334-1137.

Avian influenza is most often found in water birds, such as waterfowl (geese, ducks, swans), and shorebirds (sandpiper-type birds). The DNR has joined with U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services in a state/federal partnership to initiate a pro-active wild waterfowl surveillance program. The program is an early warning system for any evidence of disease in migratory waterfowl. Biologists from DNR and Wildlife Services will be handling all wildlife sampling and monitoring activities for Indiana.

If dead migratory geese, ducks, swans or shorebirds are found, **DO NOT PICK UP THE BIRD FOR TESTING.** Contact the DNR at: 812-334-1137 to report the location and number of dead waterfowl. DNR and USDA Wildlife Services professional staff will determine if testing is necessary.

If testing is not necessary, the bird should be disposed of properly. Dead wild birds should not be handled with bare hands. To dispose of a dead bird, use gloves or a plastic bag turned inside out over the hand to pick up the bird. Double bag it and either bury it or dispose of it in the trash.

How does the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus spread?

HPAI originated in Asia, and then spread through natural migration to North America, then to many states. Wild birds can spread HPAI through contact or environmental exposure. HPAI spreads quickly by bird-to-bird contact. Viruses can be carried by manure, equipment, vehicles, egg flats, crates, clothing, shoes and people who have come in contact with the virus.



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What is the industry and government doing to protect the U.S. food supply from avian influenza?

The likelihood of avian influenza-infected poultry entering the U.S. food supply is extremely low due to import restrictions, extensive disease testing programs, and state/federal inspection programs.

All shipments of eggs and poultry are tested to ensure that products are free of AI before entering the food supply.

The United States prohibits poultry and poultry products from regions where avian influenza has been detected in commercial or traditionally raised poultry. Monitoring for illegally smuggled poultry and poultry products has increased. All live birds, including pet birds and live poultry, imported from approved countries (except Canada) are quarantined and tested upon entry.

Will eating poultry increase the risk for becoming infected with avian influenza?

No. Properly cooked and handled poultry is not a source of infection for avian influenza viruses of any strain. Furthermore, the likelihood of infected poultry entering the U.S. food supply is extremely low due to import restrictions, extensive disease testing, and federal inspection programs. Properly prepared and cooked poultry is safe to eat. Cooking poultry to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. kills the avian influenza virus, as well as other organisms. While most human illnesses have resulted from direct contact with sick or dead birds, a small number have resulted from eating raw poultry or poultry products, so proper cooking is important in areas where avian influenza might be present.