

Birds and Bird Flu

The type of influenza (flu) virus that is currently affecting wild and domestic birds in other parts of the world is called highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1. HPAI H5N1 (bird flu) has a high death rate in some birds. It is unusual because it has also infected some people, and over 50% of those known to be infected have died. Most of the infected people have become sick after coming into close contact with infected birds without wearing a mask or using gloves. There is concern that this HPAI H5N1 virus could change and become easily transmitted from person to person, causing a global pandemic, or worldwide human illness. It is important to keep in mind that there is no human influenza pandemic in the world at this time.

- ❖ The HPAI H5N1 is an infectious viral disease of birds. Wild water and shore birds are most often infected, but the virus can be spread to other birds, animals, and rarely humans.
- ❖ The virus is spread by contact with feces or discharge from the nose and mouth of infected birds, or by eating an improperly cooked or handled ill bird or its blood.
- ❖ There is concern that some infected birds that do not show symptoms may be able to give the virus to other birds.
- ❖ It is believed that wild bird migration has contributed to the spread of the virus in Asia, Europe, and Africa. The movement of domestic birds, such as chickens and ducks, has also likely played a role in the spread of the virus.
- ❖ The best way to stop the spread of the virus is to properly destroy and dispose of both sick and dead birds infected with the virus. The importation of domestic birds is restricted to decrease the chance of HPAI H5N1 occurring in the United States.
- ❖ Countries around the world and every state in the United States are monitoring for HPAI H5N1 in birds. To report dead migratory birds fitting the following criteria, call the United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services at 1-866-4-USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297):
 - A cluster (same location and time) of more than 5 non-water birds; or
 - A single water bird (a bird with webbed feet, long slender legs, or a long bill).

- ❖ For questions regarding avian influenza and poultry, such as chickens and turkeys, or to report dead or sick poultry, contact the NH State Veterinarian's office at 603-271-2404.
- ❖ There is an HPAI H5N1 vaccine for domestic birds that can be effective in preventing the illness in birds. The use of vaccine in slowing or halting the spread of the virus, however, is uncertain. Currently, the NH Department of Agriculture does not permit the use of the HPAI H5N1 vaccine in NH domestic birds.

For specific concerns about bird flu, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Communicable Disease Control Section at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at www.avianflu.nh.gov or the US Department of Health and Human Services website at www.pandemicflu.gov.