

# Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI): What You Need to Know if You are a Hunter

Information from the Minnesota Department of Health and  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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## Background

- In March 2022, a highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus was identified in domestic poultry and wild birds in Minnesota. Since then, this H5N1 virus has been identified in commercial poultry, backyard poultry flocks, and wild birds during each migration.
- Avian influenza is a disease of birds carried naturally by wild waterfowl, such as ducks or geese. Wild birds may not show signs of illness, but HPAI causes severe illness and death in domestic poultry.
- This H5N1 virus does not pose a risk to the public, nor is it a food safety risk, but there is a potential risk for those who work directly with infected birds.

## Human health risk

- Only people who have had direct contact with infected poultry or infected wild birds are potentially at risk for getting infected with this virus. The public is not at risk.
- The risk to hunters is very low, but rarely, in other parts of the world, people in direct contact with infected wild birds have gotten sick from similar highly pathogenic H5 avian influenza viruses.
- Symptoms in people can include influenza-like illness (e.g., fever, body aches, respiratory illness) and red or itchy eyes.

## How HPAI spreads

- Infected wild birds shed HPAI viruses in their saliva, nasal discharge, and feces. Birds become infected when they gather during spring and fall migrations. Predators, such as raptors (hawks, owls) and some mammalian species, can also get HPAI by consuming infected birds.
- Spread to people occurs through close contact with infected birds.
- Person-to-person spread is very rare.

## General safety guidelines for hunters to prevent HPAI spread

- Field dress and prepare game outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.
- Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning game.
- When done handling game, wash hands thoroughly with soap or disinfectant, and clean knives, equipment, and surfaces that came in contact with game. Change and wash clothing before having contact with domestic poultry or pet birds.

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- Dispose of entrails and remaining parts of the carcass by double bagging and placing in the trash. Make sure the trash can is covered so pets or other animals cannot get into it.
- If you own hunting dogs, we recommend not allowing dogs to retrieve or come into contact with birds that appear sick. Hunters should avoid feeding their dogs raw meat from harvested birds during times when outbreaks are occurring. We also recommend keeping them away from field dressed carcasses or entrails.

### What to do if you find sick or dead wild birds

- If you find sick or dying wild birds, do not touch or handle them.
- The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is interested in reports of sick and dead wild bird reports that are consistent with potential HPAI infections.
  - Sick birds showing neurological signs (inability to fly, drooping head, tremors, loss of coordination) or that die shortly after exhibiting these signs should be reported.
  - Cases where five or more dead wild birds of any kind found in one location during the same timeframe should be reported.
  - Individuals can contact [local DNR wildlife staff](http://mndnr.gov/areas/wildlife) (mndnr.gov/areas/wildlife) or the DNR information center at [888-646-6367](tel:888-646-6367) to report sick or dead birds.
- If you discover a sick, live bird and have already filed a report, you can either let nature take its course (leave it be) or get in contact with a local wildlife rehabilitator for options ([mndnr.gov/eco/nongame/rehabilitation/injured-orphaned-wildlife.html](http://mndnr.gov/eco/nongame/rehabilitation/injured-orphaned-wildlife.html)).
- If you develop respiratory symptoms after having contact with sick or dead wild birds, please call the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Zoonotic Disease Unit at 651-201-5414. An epidemiologist will help assess the exposure and arrange for influenza testing, if needed.
- Having respiratory symptoms does not mean you are sick with avian influenza H5N1, as these symptoms are common in a variety of illnesses.

### For more information

- [Avian Influenza | Minnesota DNR \(mndnr.gov/ai\)](http://mndnr.gov/ai)
- [Bird Flu Current Situation Summary \(www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm\)](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm)
- [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Response \(www.bah.state.mn.us/hpai/\)](http://www.bah.state.mn.us/hpai/)
- [Avian Influenza | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](http://fws.gov)

**If you have questions or develop respiratory symptoms after having contact with sick or dead wild birds, call 651-201-5414 and ask for the Zoonotic Diseases Unit.**