

H5N1 in Dairy Frequently Asked Questions

This document outlines frequently asked questions from dairy producers on H5N1 in dairy and the responses from the Board or other agencies responding to this disease event.

Where has the virus been found and how is it moving around?

According to the USDA, the spread of H5N1 between states is linked to cattle movements (versus independent wild bird introductions) with further local spread between dairy farms in some states. Disease spread between dairy cattle farms is likely happening through direct and indirect routes. The virus is in the cow's milk and can spread easily through animals, vehicles, or objects. Dairy farmers need to practice elevated biosecurity to prevent the disease from spreading.

What is required in everyday biosecurity on a farm?

This is called baseline biosecurity. Baseline practices include biosecurity protocols and procedures that guide day-to-day activities in and around the farm to limit the risk of disease introduction or spread, such as wearing clean clothing and footwear and separating sick animals from the healthy herd.

What is elevated biosecurity?

This is the stage all dairy farms should be practicing in Minnesota during this disease outbreak. It includes:

- Essential Traffic: Only important vehicles and equipment should come onto or leave the farm.
- Mortality Disposal: Dead animals should be disposed of carefully to avoid spreading disease. If they're taken off-site, the truck should limit stops and follow a specified route that avoids other farms. The truck and equipment must be cleaned before going to another farm.
- Manure/Bedding/Waste Milk Disposal: Waste products like manure, bedding, and waste milk should be kept on-site to prevent disease spread. If they must leave the farm, it should be done carefully to avoid contaminating other farms. Equipment used should be cleaned before going elsewhere.

What is containment biosecurity?

This is the level of biosecurity used on H5N1 affected farms. These measures are to prevent the virus from spreading off-farm through things like people, equipment, and waste. Board of Animal Health staff help affected producers develop a Containment Biosecurity Plan. Protocols include:

- Entry points and cleaning procedures.

- Proper disposal for dead animals, bedding, manure, waste milk, and garbage.
- Movement controls for who and what can come onto or leave the farm, including livestock and products.
- Guidelines for how supplies and feed are delivered, including who can handle them and how they're transported.
- Communication and security policies for how biosecurity is communicated to staff and visitors and how to keep the premises secure.
- Pest control measures to keep pests like birds and rodents away from the farm.
- Biosecurity of anyone coming onto the premises to collect surveillance samples.

Are producers and veterinarians legally required to report suspected disease?

Yes, in both Minnesota statutes and rules.

MINN. STAT. § 35.06: A person who knows or reasonably suspects that a contagious or infectious disease exists in a domestic animal shall immediately notify the board.

H5N1 must be reported to the Board because it is a contagious disease in a domestic species.

What do producers do if they notice any dead wildlife or barn cats around their dairy?

It's encouraged to sample dead or sick wild birds and mammals near affected areas. Contact USDA Wildlife Services at 1-866-4USDA-WS (or 1-866-487-3297) to request assistance.

Cats are especially vulnerable to the virus. Contact your veterinarian or the Board if sick or dead cats are found near affected areas. The Board is interested in testing cats or other sick domestic animals near dairies. USDA will pay testing fees for any species associated with a dairy farm or with potential exposures like cats.

What is a “non-negative” test result?

Non-negative is like saying positive. A true negative means no part of the virus was found in the sample.

What information do you collect from a producer after a non-negative result?

- Name and address of the person in charge.
- Where the affected animals are located and the Premises ID number.
- What kind of farming or livestock operation.
- How many animals, what type, and how they're officially identified.

- Any animals that have come onto or left the farm in the past month, including where they were before and after.
- How many animals are sick or have died.
- Signs of illness in the animals.
- Results from examinations after animals have died.

Does producer data remain private?

The only information associated with positive herds the Board releases is the county where a herd is located, its size and the species (example, H5N1 detection in Ramsey County dairy herd, inventory 300). The Board has authority to keep this information private in Minnesota Statute 13.643 Subd. 6 Animal premises data.

What happens to animals on the farm after a non-negative result?

All dairy cattle and susceptible species (poultry, cats) are immediately quarantined on affected farms. The Board may also quarantine other animals if it determines a risk of disease spread is likely.

How do you define lactating dairy cattle?

Dairy cows currently in one of the lactation phases (early, mid, and late) of their current production cycle.

How do you define dairy cattle?

Cattle breeds raised for the primary purpose of milk production for human consumption.

What does the quarantine involve?

Animals and products will be placed under a minimum of 30-days quarantine with requirements. See, “How is the quarantine released?” question for more details.

The farm will be instructed to conduct surveillance testing during the quarantine to monitor the herd’s exposure to the virus and the affected animals’ recovery.

Farms may request specific movement permits for animals, products, manure, waste or mortality from the Board, which will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. No movements are allowed without pre-approval from the Board.

What happens to milk from unaffected cows under quarantine?

Milk can continue to be sold for commercial pasteurization under the guidance of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA).

What happens to manure on the farm under quarantine?

Manure must be kept onsite during quarantine unless a movement permit is requested, and the Board approves it. Contact your case manager to request a movement permit.

What happens to waste milk on the farm under quarantine?

Waste milk cannot be moved off the farm without a permit. A Board representative will work with the infected premises to develop a Herd Milk Management Plan, which will need to be approved by the MDA. A template plan is available to assist the producer through this process. The plan will address handling of waste milk, and the handling of any milk sold for pasteurization that is not accepted by the plant, such as for antibiotic positive loads, qualities rejections or other similar situations. MDA, in consultation with the Board will approve this plan and work with the producer to address any specific or unique disposal situations on the affected farm.

What are bulk milk tank samples and when are they used?

Bulk milk tank samples are a way to take a small amount of milk from all cows in the herd and test it for the virus. This could be as simple as sampling from an actual bulk tank on the farm, or it may involve inline sampling or drawing the sample at the processor.

Bulk tank milk sampling is used during the surveillance of a quarantined herd to both keep an eye on any continued viral load in the herd or to release the quarantine.

Are there exceptions to the quarantine?

You can complete a H5N1 Permitted Movement Request to apply for permission to move specific animals and/or products on or off the quarantined premises.

How is the quarantine released?

The quarantine is in place a minimum 30 days from the initial non-negative test result. The following testing requirements must also be met:

- Three consecutive H5N1-negative bulk milk samples collected at least one-week apart and tested at a NAHLN laboratory like the U of M Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. Additionally, all cows whose milk is being withheld from the bulk tank due to clinical signs or a H5N1 positive result must have a negative H5N1 sample collected at the same time as the third negative bulk tank sample.

The Board will work with producers on alternative sample collection if a bulk tank sample isn't available.

All samples must be tested at a NAHLN laboratory like the U of M Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

See the [H5N1 Dairy Quarantine Testing Protocol flowchart](#) at the end of this document for specific details.

Can I ship non-clinical lactating dairy cattle or affected lactating dairy from a quarantined premises within Minnesota to slaughter?

You must contact the Board to request a movement permit for any movement of dairy cattle off a quarantined premises.

Are there testing requirements for unaffected herds before exhibitions?

Lactating dairy cows are required to have a negative test for H5N1 and a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) for all exhibitions in Minnesota, effective June 18, 2024 until December 31, 2024. Samples must be collected within seven days prior to attending an exhibition.

Does a H5N1 positive result in any additional restrictions or regulations at exhibitions?

All susceptible animals on a H5N1 positive premises are quarantined and not allowed at exhibitions.

What happens if a cow shows H5N1 clinical signs at an exhibition?

The official veterinarian would identify animals with clinical signs of H5N1 infection and have them sent home for isolation and testing. The official veterinarian must notify the Board, which will start gathering information for potentially exposed animals and disease tracing.

Where can I learn more about biosecurity?

Contact Minnesota's Secure Food Supply Coordinator, David Weinand (david.weinand@state.mn.us) to learn more about biosecurity plans and the Secure Milk Supply.

Biosecurity on a positive farm differs from everyday practices because the producer should also focus on measures to prevent the spread of disease off of the farm.

Who contacts a producer after a non-negative test result?

The Board of Animal Health and USDA Minnesota staff contact the producer when the NAHLN Laboratory reports a non-negative result. A local Case Manager from the Board and an epidemiology officer will visit with the producer to discuss the result, next steps, and ask questions to try and determine how the herd may have been infected.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) will also contact the owner or manager. When owners or managers are contacted by MDH, it is expected they will provide the names and contact information for all personnel who would have had contact with ill dairy cattle within two days of illness detection or within two days of test-positive samples being taken. MDH will call each employee on infected farms to provide information on human

health risk and prevention and enroll employees in an optional health check system, which is a periodic two-question survey on symptoms. Participation by individual dairy workers is voluntary. It is the dairy worker's individual choice to answer or not answer their phone or a text or preferably to answer and then decline to be contacted further.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture oversees milk safety and may also contact the producer.

Talk to your case manager about any other state agencies that may be involved after a positive detection.

Are there control zones placed around non-negative farms?

There are no official disease control zones placed around dairy sites because this is classified as an emerging disease and not a Foreign Animal Disease in cattle. The Board recommends enhanced biosecurity for premises with cattle and poultry located within the county and neighboring counties where H5N1 has been confirmed.

H5N1 Dairy Quarantine Testing Protocol

Quarantine release requirements:

- Quarantine must last at least 30 days.
- 3 Consecutive Negative Bulk Milk Tank Tests AND
- Negative testing of all clinical cows not contributing to the bulk “for-sale” milk tank.

[Text version of flow chart
on next page.](#)

Positive test result:
Wait 7 days and
restart testing
protocol at Bulk
Milk Tank Test #1.

Official Quarantine Issued

Wait 7 days

Bulk Milk Tank Test #1

Positive

Negative

Wait 7 days

Bulk Milk Tank Test #2

Positive

Negative

Wait 7 days

Bulk Milk Tank Test #3

AND
Test all clinical cows not
contributing to bulk milk tank

ANY POSITIVE

ALL NEGATIVE

Quarantine is Released

H5N1 Dairy Quarantine Testing Protocol

Official Quarantine Issued

Wait 7 days before starting Bulk Milk Tank Test #1.

Bulk Milk Tank Test #1

- If positive, wait 7 days and restart protocol at Bulk Milk Tank Test #1.
- If negative, wait 7 days and perform Bulk Milk Tank Test #2.

Bulk Milk Tank Test #2

- If positive, wait 7 days and restart protocol at Bulk Milk Tank Test #1.
- If negative, wait 7 days and perform Bulk Milk Tank Test #3 and test clinical cows.

Bulk Milk Tank Test #3 and Testing of all clinical cows not contributing to the bulk milk tank.

- If any positive, wait 7 days and restart protocol at Bulk Milk Tank Test #1.
- If all negative, quarantine will be released.

Official Quarantine is Released

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