



Avian Influenza in Alaska

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian influenza, or bird flu, is an infectious disease caused by a group of influenza viruses that are commonly found in birds. These viruses occur naturally in wild birds, such as waterfowl and shorebirds, and can spread to domestic birds. AI virus strains are classified into two categories according to the disease severity in poultry. Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) typically causes few or no symptoms in poultry or wild birds. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) causes severe symptoms and mortality in poultry, and sometimes mortality in wild birds. In April 2022, the first case of HPAI in Alaska was confirmed in a non-commercial backyard flock of chickens and ducks in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Since then, there have been confirmed cases in domestic poultry and in wild birds, including eagles and other raptors, seabirds, shorebirds and waterfowl, as well as in other wildlife, across Alaska. This [infographic](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explains more about this strain of bird flu.

Can humans be infected?

It is possible but rare for avian influenza to spread from animals to humans. However, the risk to people from the current H5N1 strain is considered low. As of April 8, 2024, there have been [two human cases of HPAI A\(H5N1\) identified in the United States](#); one in Colorado (2022) and one in Texas (2024). As a precaution, people should avoid direct contact with wild birds and avoid handling sick or dead birds. Hunters can protect themselves by not handling or eating meat from sick game, wearing rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling game and not drinking, eating or putting anything in your mouth while handling game. Thoroughly wash your hands, clean all equipment and surfaces that come in contact with game, and cook game and eggs to an internal temperature of 165°F. You cannot get avian influenza from properly cooked eggs, game and poultry products.

Who should I contact about dead birds?

If you find a dead or sick wild bird or have concerns about migratory birds call the Alaska Sick or Dead Bird Hotline at **866-527-3358**. Avoid handling any sick birds or birds that are found dead. If you need to handle a dead bird, use disposable gloves or an inside-out plastic bag. Double bag the carcass and dispose of it in regular trash. To report illness or death in a backyard flock, please contact your local veterinarian or the Office of the State Veterinarian at **907-375-8215**. Do not attempt to care for these animals on your own.

Are other animal species at risk?

This virus can infect several species of wild birds and domestic poultry, including chickens, turkeys, quail, guinea fowl, ducks, and free-ranging and captive wild birds. Less frequently, avian influenza viruses have infected rats, mice, weasels, ferrets, foxes, pigs, cats, dogs, and horses. As of April 8, 2024, in Alaska, this H5N1 strain has been detected in foxes; black, brown, and polar bears. To report sick or dead wild mammals call your local Alaska Department of Fish and Game office. There have been no cases of the HPAI virus infecting dogs of any kind in North America. Influenza viruses do not affect fish.

How long can avian influenza survive in the environment?

Influenza viruses, including avian influenza, can be removed from clothing and surfaces by detergents and disinfectants, and heating and drying will inactivate them. However, these viruses can persist in soil, feces, and pond water for varying amounts of time, especially in cool and wet conditions.

Additional information on avian influenza:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: [Avian Influenza](#)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: [Alaska Bird FAQ: if it's sick, abandoned, injured or dead](#)
- Alaska Department of Health: [Avian Influenza](#)
- Alaska Public Health Alert Network: [Avian Influenza Health Advisory](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Information on Bird Flu](#)
- USDA-APHIS: [Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Wild Birds](#)
- Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation/State Veterinarian: [Avian Influenza Confirmed Cases in Alaska](#)