



New Hampshire Fish and Game Department

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Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Frequently Asked Questions March 2, 2022

What is highly pathogenic avian influenza?

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is a viral disease that can affect many species of birds. It is typically not harmful to wild birds, but it can be highly contagious. It is often fatal in chickens and other domestic birds, however. The HPAI Eurasian H5 strain is especially deadly in poultry. Symptoms in sick birds include lack of energy, lack of appetite, nasal discharge, coughing, sneezing, reduced egg production, swelling of various parts of the body, diarrhea, lack of coordination, and even sudden death.

When were cases of HPAI H5 found in New Hampshire?

HPAI Eurasian H5 was first discovered in ducks in New Hampshire in February 2022. The first report consisted of 20 mallards that tested positive in Rockingham County..

How were the positive cases in New Hampshire detected?

These first cases in New Hampshire were detected through annual surveillance conducted by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). USDA Staff coordinated with Fish and Game biologists to collect samples during the Department's annual waterfowl banding work.

Why is there concern about avian influenza and wild birds?

Among wild birds, HPAI H5 affects mainly ducks, geese, turkeys, gulls, and raptors. It has been associated with mortality in some wild birds, but they usually do not get sick from the virus. Some raptor species (hawks, falcons, eagles, and owls) have been detected with Eurasian H5 HPAI virus infection and some Canada geese have been found with clinical symptoms, such as swimming in circles, twisted necks, and tremors.

Are there different strains or types of avian influenza?

Avian influenza A viruses are designated as highly pathogenic (HPAI) and low pathogenic (LPAI). LPAI viruses generally do not cause disease in wild or domestic birds. Both can spread rapidly in poultry, however, but the HPAI strains can cause severe disease with high mortality in domestic birds.

How is the virus spread?

While studies are being conducted to determine exactly how the virus is transferred from species to species, the spread of the virus has been largely driven by migratory waterfowl. Wild waterfowl and other species shed the virus into the environment through their oral and nasal secretions and feces.

Can wild birds spread the virus to domestic birds?

Although it is possible for domestic poultry to become infected with avian influenza from direct contact with wild birds, it is more likely that avian influenza viruses are spread indirectly to poultry on contaminated feed, clothing, and equipment. It is recommended that producers who raise domestic poultry prevent wild birds and other wildlife from coming into direct contact with their poultry, as well as wild

bird fecal material and secretions from being accidentally transported on boots, equipment, and feed to their birds.

Is there a risk to other animals besides birds?

There have been some cases of other types of animals contracting avian flu besides birds, including cats, dogs, ferrets, and pigs, but avian influenza mainly affects birds.

Is there a risk to people from this virus?

Avian influenza viruses usually do not infect people, but rare cases of human infection with these viruses have been reported. Human infections can happen when enough of the virus gets into a person's eyes, nose, mouth, or is inhaled. Illness has ranged from mild to severe.

What precautions can hunters take?

Since there are other viruses besides HPAI that can affect wild animals, it is recommended that hunters always take precautions to help prevent the spread of disease. Safe handling practices include: avoid taking or handling an animal that appears sick; wear rubber gloves when gutting or butchering; never consume the brain, spinal cord, eyeballs, spleen, liver, or lymph nodes of your harvest; disinfect all tools after each use using a 50/50 solution of household chlorine bleach and water; cook all meat thoroughly. Learn more at <https://www.avma.org/resources/public-health/disease-precautions-hunters>.

What is NH Fish and Game doing about this virus in wild birds?

Fish and Game staff assisted with the collection of birds for testing and will continue to collaborate with the US Department of Agriculture on any future testing of wild birds. Staff are also collaborating with the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food to monitor the situation and share resources and information. NH Fish and Game will continue to provide any updates to the public, especially the hunting community, as it becomes available.

What should I do if I discover a sick or dead bird?

Birds die naturally for all kinds of reasons. NH Fish and Game is interested in reports of significant numbers of sick or dead birds, however. Never approach or touch a sick bird. Leave dead birds alone out in the wild. On public property, you can call local authorities. If you encounter a dead bird on your property or plan to dispose of any dead bird, never touch it with your bare hands. Wear gloves or use an inverted trash bag. Invert the bag over the bird or use a new bag. Tightly close or tie the bag, then put that bag in a second plastic bag and close or tie it tightly. Then dispose of it in your regular trash. Dispose of gloves and thoroughly wash your hands afterward. If weather allows, dead birds can also be buried on your own property.