

BIRD FLU (AVIAN INFLUENZA TYPE A)

Reviewed: February 2025

Avian Influenza type A (H5N1) is a virus commonly known as "Bird flu" that causes disease in birds and poultry. H5N1 is not a new virus, however, we are seeing more outbreaks in the U.S. in poultry, dairy cows, and humans. Since April 2024, more than 60 people in the U.S. have been confirmed to have bird flu, including one child. California has one of the highest numbers of human cases.

The risk of getting the bird flu is generally low. However, some people are more likely to be exposed, including:

- **Farmworkers** who work with dairy cows, poultry
- **Hatchery workers, slaughterhouse workers**, and those that handle raw dairy products
- **People with backyard flocks** (chickens, ducks, turkey, etc.)
- **Veterinary, zoo, animal control**, and other wildlife animal workers

Bird flu does not spread person-to-person. The virus spreads from a sick animal to a person by:

- Breathing in dust or respiratory droplets containing the virus,
- Touching your eyes, nose, or mouth after touching raw milk, handling dead or sick animals, and contaminated surfaces, without washing your hands
- Drinking raw milk or having some splash in your eyes, nose, or mouth

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS IN HUMANS:

Some people who get infected by bird flu have no symptoms, while others get very sick. In the U.S., as of January 2025, one person has died from the virus.

- Conjunctivitis (eye redness)
- Flu-like upper respiratory symptoms (e.g. runny or stuffy nose, cough, sore throat)
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Seizures
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM GETTING BIRD FLU?

- Avoid touching animals —whether sick, dead, or alive—or anything they have come in contact with. If you are able, wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as goggles, a face shield, and gloves.
- Avoid contact with wild birds, even if even if they do not look sick.
- If you work with dairy cows or poultry, try to work outdoors or in a well-ventilated area if you must work indoors. Consider wearing dedicated work clothing and shoes. Be sure to remove your work shoes, change your clothes, and shower after working.
- Avoid drinking raw milk or products made with raw milk. Pasteurized milk and dairy products as safe to consume. Pasteurization is the process of heating up the milk to kill any germs, including the bird flu virus.
- Follow food safety recommendations when handling and cooking all food, including poultry and eggs. This includes cooking these foods until they reach an internal temperature of 165F.
- Wash your hands after contact with animals or their environments, before taking breaks, and before eating or drinking
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, like doorknobs and phones, frequently

The seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against the bird flu but can help reduce the chances of getting a double infection and getting very sick. If you have symptoms and are concerned you may have the bird flu, contact your medical provider or the Fresno Department of Public Health to arrange testing.

References:

- CDC: <https://bit.ly/3EXme2G>
- CDC: <https://bit.ly/4b6wbXL>
- CDC: <https://bit.ly/4gUfjjo>
- CDPH: <https://bit.ly/4k1FEnn>
- CDC: <https://bit.ly/3ENcecs>
- CDPH: <https://bit.ly/4gOwesr>