

## Monthly Medical Moment: February 2025

### Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A(H5N1) Virus or “Bird Flu”

#### WHAT AND WHO

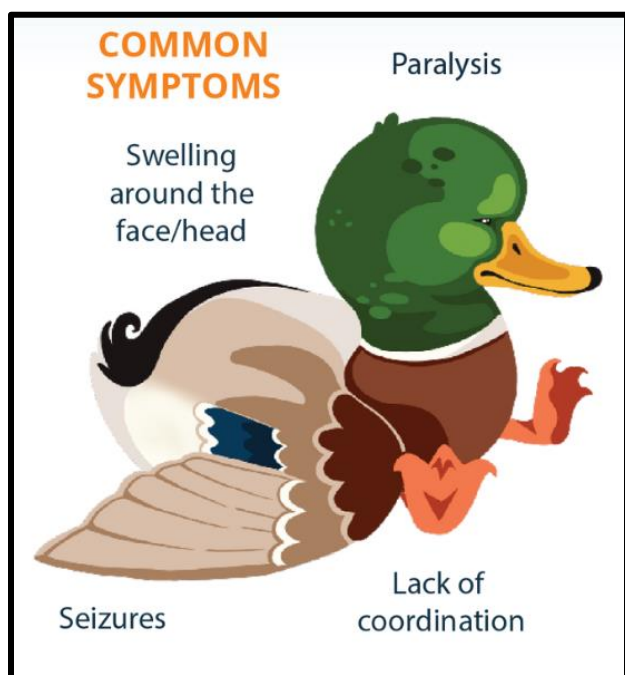
- A subtype of the influenza virus that affects primarily birds (geese, ducks, swans, chickens, turkey) and mammals (foxes, bears, seals, sea lions, dogs, cats, cows, goats) – common backyard birds and songbirds do not usually carry it<sup>1</sup>

#### HOW

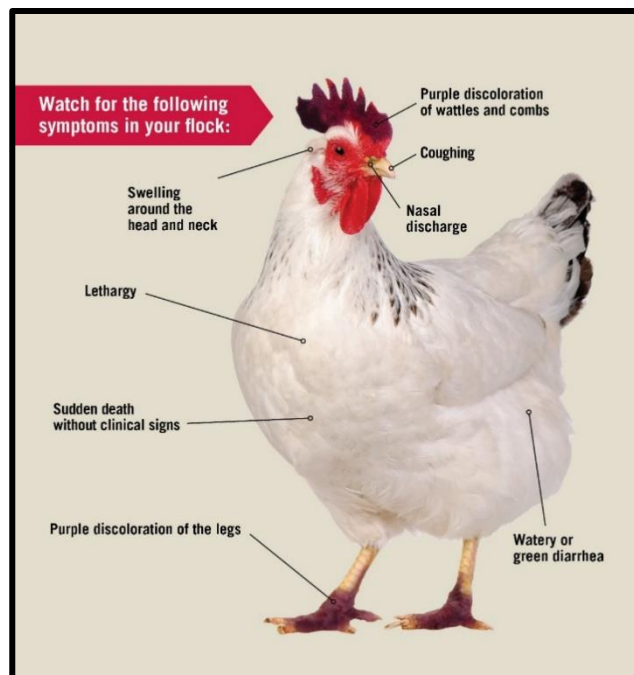
- Does not easily transmit from person to person – people at risk are those who have prolonged, unprotected or recreational exposure to infected wild birds, poultry, and livestock (including carcasses, feces, and their environment), especially after not wearing recommended personal protective equipment/PPE (such as gloves, N95 respirator or well-fitting facemask, eye protection)<sup>1,2</sup>
- The current risk of bird flu infection is LOW for the public – the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention national influenza surveillance systems show no indicators of unusual influenza activity in people<sup>3</sup>

#### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Poultry signs: sudden death, decreased egg production or soft-shelled/misshapen eggs, nasal discharge, cough, sneeze, diarrhea, low energy/appetite, uncoordinated, purple discoloration of legs/combs/wattles/hocks, or swelling of head/eyelids/combs/wattles/hocks<sup>4</sup>
- Dairy cow signs: decreased milk production, low appetite<sup>1</sup>
- Human signs: fever, chills, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, conjunctivitis, headaches, runny/stuffy nose, muscle/body aches, diarrhea<sup>5</sup>
  - There have been 67 confirmed human cases in the US, and 1 death, with most being due to exposures to dairy cattle and poultry farms/culling operations<sup>3</sup>



Adapted from Everything You Need to Know About Avian Influenza. 2024.  
<https://www.wildliferescue.ca/2024/03/01/avian-influenza/>



Avian Flu. University of Georgia Extension. 2025. <https://extension.uga.edu/topic-areas/animal-production/poultry-eggs/avian-flu>.



### THE CURRENT SITUATION IN MARYLAND

- Stats from US Department of Agriculture (as of 2/7/25)<sup>6</sup>:
  - 5 commercial flocks affected, 1 backyard flock (2,808,744 total birds affected)
  - 50 wild bird detections since 2022
  - No wild mammal detections since 2022, no dairy cattle detections, NO human cases<sup>3</sup>
- Sick animal reporting: Maryland Department of Agriculture 410-841-5810 for agricultural animals, or USDA Wildlife Services Office at 1-877-463-6497 for wild animals

### THE CURRENT SITUATION IN VIRGINIA

- Stats from USDA (as of 2/7/25)<sup>6</sup>:
  - 1 commercial flock affected, 1 backyard flock (479,160 total birds affected)
  - 104 wild bird detections since 2022
  - No wild mammal detections since 2022, no dairy cattle detections, NO human cases<sup>3</sup>
- Sick animal reporting: State Veterinarian's Office at 804-692-0601 for backyard or commercial poultry, or the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources via the Virginia Wildlife Conflict Helpline at 855-571-9003 for wild animals or the USDA toll-free number 866-536-7593

New York<sup>6</sup>: 1 commercial flock, 4 backyard flocks (127,662 birds); 472 wild birds; 30 wild mammals (fox, squirrel, bobcat, raccoon, opossum, skunk, leopard); 0 dairy cattle; NO human cases

West Virginia<sup>6</sup>: 0 commercial, 2 backyard flocks (259 birds); 6 wild birds; NO wild mammals, cattle, human cases

*Reporting: USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service 1-866-536-7593*

### PROTECTING YOU AND YOUR FLOCK<sup>1,4,5,7-9</sup>

- Restrict access to poultry
- Prevent cross-contaminating areas by using foot mats with disinfectant, washing boots, changing footwear or using foot covers, securing feed to prevent wild animal access, and cleaning your tools/vehicles. Change clothes before contact with healthy poultry and after handling wild birds. Wash your hands after touching birds and animals, even at zoos or fairs
- Limit contact with areas where waterfowl or wildlife might be; do not handle or move sick/dead birds
- If you get sick, isolate! Notify your healthcare provider, and don't go to work or school
- You can still drink milk – dairies can only send milk from healthy animals for processing, and milk that undergoes pasteurization means that bacteria and viruses have been destroyed. Avoid raw/unpasteurized milk/dairy products
- You can still eat eggs – it is unlikely that infected eggs enter the market, and properly storing/preparing eggs can further lower risk of exposure
  - Safe egg habits: buy refrigerated eggs, make sure eggs are clean and not cracked, store in a refrigerator at 40 degrees or below, use within 3 weeks, never leave eggs outside of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours (or more than 1 hour at temperatures above 90 degrees)
- The seasonal flu vaccine will not prevent bird flu infection, but it can reduce the risk of getting sick with seasonal + bird flu co-infections

#### References

1. Avian influenza. Centers for Zoonotic and Vector-borne Diseases. Maryland Department of Health. <https://health.maryland.gov/phhp/OIDEOR/CZVBD/Pages/Avian-Influenza.aspx>
2. Updated joint FAO/WHO/WOAH Public Health Assessment of Recent Influenza A(H5) Virus Events in Animals and People. Dec 2024. [https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/updated-joint-fao-who-woah-assessment-of-recent-influenza-a\(h5n1\)-virus-events-in-animals-and-people\\_dec2024](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/updated-joint-fao-who-woah-assessment-of-recent-influenza-a(h5n1)-virus-events-in-animals-and-people_dec2024)
3. H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html>
4. Avian Influenza in Poultry Flocks. Maryland Department of Agriculture. <https://mda.maryland.gov/Pages/AvianFlu.aspx>
5. Avian Influenza. Virginia Department of Health. <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/influenza-flu-in-virginia/avian-flu/>
6. 2022-2024 Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections>
7. Avian Influenza. Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. <https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/animals-avian-influenza.shtml>
8. H5 Bird Flu Response in Virginia. Virginia Department of Health. <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/news/h5-bird-flu-response-in-virginia/>
9. What You Need to Know About Egg Safety. US Food and Drug Administration. <https://www.fda.gov/food/buy-store-serve-safe-food/what-you-need-know-about-egg-safety>

Please contact the Health Unit with any questions or concerns.

For emergencies, please call 9-1-1.

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