

# What Backyard Flock Owners Need to Know about Bird Flu (Influenza H5N1)<sup>1</sup>

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## What is bird flu (influenza H5N1)?

Bird flu is caused by the H5N1 subtype of influenza A virus. Among migratory birds and poultry, this virus can be highly contagious and cause severe disease and death. Variants of this virus can cause infections in dairy cows and other animals and can cause severe disease in cats. Rarely, it can infect humans.

The virus spreads through direct contact with infected birds or other animals. It can also spread through contact with contaminated feed or water, poultry droppings, and equipment, clothing, and shoes contaminated with the virus. Human infections are very rare but can occur through close contact with infected birds or environments contaminated with the virus. Human cases have been reported among persons who inhaled dust in chicken houses. Biosecurity and proper hygiene significantly reduce this risk. Biosecurity refers to all measures aimed at preventing the introduction or spread of harmful organisms. This publication aims to help owners of backyard flocks protect their birds and identify possible signs of influenza H5N1 infection.

## Protecting Your Flock

Protect your chickens from influenza H5N1 by implementing strong biosecurity measures, including limiting visitors, isolating new birds, regularly disinfecting chicken houses, and preventing contact with wild or migratory birds.

Stop migratory birds from entering your farm by using safe and legal methods, such as humane deterrents (visual scare devices, reflective tapes, scare balloons), noisemakers, or netting over the chicken run. Check local regulations before using these methods.

Look for symptoms such as sudden death, lack of energy, decreased appetite, swelling of the comb or wattles, respiratory distress, diarrhea, decreased egg production, and neurological signs. These symptoms indicate your poultry might have influenza H5N1.

## Sick Poultry in Your Flock

If you have sick or deceased poultry, report your case to local agricultural or veterinary authorities to contain any potential spread of the virus. Most states have a direct telephone number that can be called to report dead poultry. To report unusual sickness or die-offs in domestic poultry in Florida, contact the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) at (850) 410-0900 (during office hours), at 1-800-342-5869 (after hours), or by email at [RAD@FDACS.gov](mailto:RAD@FDACS.gov).

If your birds test positive for influenza H5N1, follow instructions provided by agricultural and veterinary officials, which typically include isolation of the bird, humane euthanasia of infected birds, thorough cleaning, disinfection, monitoring, and/or a fallow period.

Discard eggs from infected or potentially exposed birds safely and hygienically. Consult your local agriculture department for specific disposal guidelines.

Visit <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/defend-the-flock> for precautionary measures.

Bird handlers should take the following precautionary measures.

- When working indoors, work in well-ventilated areas. Do not bring birds inside the house.
- When working outdoors, work upwind of birds to decrease risk of inhaling aerosols such as dust, feathers, or dander.
- When possible, wear rubber or latex gloves that are disposable or can be disinfected.
- When possible, wear protective eyewear or a face shield with a well-fitting face mask or N95 respirator while handling birds.
- Wear boots or shoes that can be disinfected after use.
- Wear coveralls or other protective outerwear.
- Wash all clothing and outerwear worn after use and dry using high heat. Shower before changing into clean clothing.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.

- Disinfect work surfaces and equipment.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling birds.

## Selling Eggs from Your Backyard Flock

To sell poultry or eggs to the public, a producer must be permitted by FDACS: <https://www.fdacs.gov/Business-Services/Food/Food-Establishments/Limited-Poultry-and-Egg-Farms>.

Food safety questions should be addressed by the Food and Drug Administration:

<https://www.fda.gov/food/guidance-documents-regulatory-information-topic-food-and-dietary-supplements/egg-guidance-regulation-and-other-information>.

## Summary

This publication provides backyard flock owners with important information about influenza H5N1. It discusses how poultry can be impacted, how to identify sick poultry, and what to do if you suspect you have sick poultry.

Frequently asked questions, fact sheets, and other helpful resources related to bird flu are also available through the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources:

<https://piecenter.com/resources/birdflu/>.

## References

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