

## What is avian influenza?



Avian influenza (AI), also known as bird flu, is a respiratory disease of birds caused by an influenza virus. AI was discovered in Italy more than 100 years ago. AI is spread primarily by migratory waterfowl. Waterfowl can spread the disease to poultry if they share food and water.

Many strains of the AI virus exist; but not all of the strains cause disease in poultry and few strains cause disease in people. One way to differentiate these viruses is to categorize them as "high path" or "low path" based on the strain's ability to cause disease in chickens. Each year there are cases of a "low path" AI in Minnesota and other states that cause little or no disease in poultry. Minnesota's poultry industry routinely tests turkey flocks for AI; in the last 25 years, no cases of "high path" AI have been found.

## What is special about the H5N1 strain of avian influenza?

Recent attention has been given to the H5N1 strain of Avian Influenza (H5N1), that it has surfaced in Europe and Asia. This "high path" AI virus that can infect a variety of animal and bird species and could mutate into a strain that threatens human health. To date, no cases of this virus have been detected in North American wild or domestic birds; however, government and poultry producers remain vigilant.

### Other sources for information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/qa/htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/qa/htm)
- American Veterinary Medical Association  
[www.avma.org/onlnews/javma/apr06/060415a.asp](http://www.avma.org/onlnews/javma/apr06/060415a.asp)
- American Animal Hospital Association  
[www.healthypet.com/library](http://www.healthypet.com/library)
- Cornell Feline Health Center  
[www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/news/influenza.htm](http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/news/influenza.htm)



Center for Animal Health  
and Food Safety  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



## Avian Influenza

### A Guide for Veterinarians &

### Companion Animal Owners



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Minnesota Department of Agriculture •  
651-555-5555 •  
[www.mda.state.mn.us](http://www.mda.state.mn.us) •



### Cat and Dog Owners



\*\*\* As long as there is no H5N1 strain of avian influenza in the United States, there is no immediate risk to your cat or dog becoming infected with H5N1. Should the H5N1 strain of avian influenza be found in wild or domestic birds in Minnesota, we would recommend the following for cat and dog owners:

- Do not allow your pets to roam freely outdoors
- If your cat must go outside, consider placing a bell on its collar in order to scare off birds and other prey.
- Walk your dog on a leash and away from areas where wild birds reside.
- Avoid contact with stray animals.
- If your cat or dog brings a dead bird home, put on plastic gloves and dispose of bird in a plastic bag. Then wash your hands thoroughly.
- If your cat or dog develops breathing problems or nasal discharge, contact your veterinarian.

### Pet Bird Owners



- Purchase birds from reputable sources.
- Do not purchase wild caught birds.
- Prevent contact between pet birds and wild birds, particularly waterfowl.
- Before introducing a new bird to existing birds in your household, isolate new birds for 10-30 days.
- Clean and disinfect bird cages and/or housing areas regularly.

## Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

### What are the symptoms of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza in birds?

Symptoms are similar to other severe respiratory diseases of birds: coughing, sneezing, decreased egg production, swelling of the head, comb, wattles and sudden death.

### What other animals have been infected with the H5N1 strain of avian influenza?

Wild and domestic birds and poultry, humans, cats, dogs, pigs, palm civets, cynomolgus macaques, New Zealand white rabbits, stone martens, tigers, leopards, ferrets and rats can become infected with the H5N1 avian influenza virus. It is possible that other mammals may be susceptible to infection as well. In 2005, several cases of influenza in cats caused by the H5N1 strain of avian influenza were reported in Europe.

### How do cats get infected with the H5N1 strain of avian influenza?

Cats were primarily exposed by eating or having close contact with infected birds. Additionally, cat-to-cat transmission of the virus has been documented.

No cases of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza have been reported in any animal species including domestic cats in North America. Therefore, there is no immediate risk to your cat or dog becoming infected with H5N1.

### What are the symptoms of infection with the H5N1 strain of avian influenza in cats?

Symptoms are consistent with most respiratory diseases of cats: labored breathing, fever, discharge from the eyes and nose, and lack of energy.

### Can I get H5N1 avian influenza from my cat?

No. There is no evidence of people becoming infected with H5N1 from cats.

### Can dogs get avian influenza?

There is limited information on the susceptibility of dogs to infection with the H5N1 strain of avian influenza. Dogs exposed to the virus have not shown signs of illness. However, more information is needed to determine the risk of H5N1 avian influenza infections in dogs.

### What about H3N3 Dog Influenza?

Another newly emerging disease caused by a H3N3 influenza virus has been causing illness in dogs. This new virus is different than the H5N1 strain of avian influenza. The new dog influenza virus is closely related to the virus that causes influenza in horses. It is likely that this virus mutated to produce the new dog influenza virus. The dog influenza virus is not known to be transmitted to humans. For more information on dog influenza please refer to: [http://www.avma.org/public\\_health/influenza/canine\\_guidelines.asp](http://www.avma.org/public_health/influenza/canine_guidelines.asp)



### How is H5N1 avian influenza diagnosed in animals?

Veterinarians submit blood or tissue samples from sick or dead animals to veterinary diagnostic laboratories for testing. Veterinarians should contact their diagnostic laboratory for specific sample submission protocols.