

Suspected Avian Flu Cases Reported Across Massachusetts – Protect Yourself and Your Animals and Report Dead Birds

On January 29, 2025, state environmental and health officials informed the public that Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 virus is suspected to be the cause of death in cases of both wild and domestic birds in several Massachusetts municipalities. The Bedford Health Department has not been informed of any H5N1 positive birds collected from Bedford. The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife), the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) are advising the public to refrain from handling birds or other animals that are dead or appear sick and report suspected cases.

H5N1 human cases have been rare in the US and primarily associated with direct contact with infected commercial chicken and turkey flocks or infected dairy cattle; no human cases have been identified in Massachusetts. Most confirmed human cases across the country have been mild; however, severe disease is possible and there has been one fatality in the US reported in an individual with pre-existing health conditions. Surveillance of milk from dairy cattle herds in Massachusetts has remained negative; however, H5N1 is widespread in wild waterfowl in the Commonwealth.

Report Wild Birds: The public should report observations to MassWildlife of sick or deceased birds if 5 or more birds are found at a single location, using this simple form at mass.gov/reportbirds.

Report Domestic Birds: The public should report sick or dead poultry or other domestic birds by calling MDAR's Division of Animal Health at (617) 626-1795 or through mass.gov/reportpoultry. Humans are rarely infected with avian influenza viruses. Humans that have direct contact with animals infected with HPAI are the most at risk of becoming infected. People with questions about the public health impact of HPAI can visit DPH's Avian Influenza web page (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/avian-flu>) or call the Division of Epidemiology (available 24/7) at 617-983-6800.

Tips for the Public:

Avoid handling birds and other wildlife: The public should strictly avoid handling wildlife, especially sick or dead birds or other animals.

Keep pets safe: Dogs and other pets should always be leashed and kept away from wildlife. Cats are highly susceptible to HPAI and may die from an infection. Cat owners in affected areas should keep their pets indoors to prevent exposure to infected wildlife.

Hunting: While eating wild game meat is generally considered safe, licensed hunters can minimize the risk of wildlife diseases by following best practices when handling and processing game - <https://www.mass.gov/news/what-hunters-should-know-about-hpai>.

Backyard Flock Owners: Navigate here to learn how to protect yourself from HPAI - <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/caring/index.html>.