

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 in the Workplace

What to know about HPAI

Avian Influenza (AI) is a disease caused by influenza A virus. The virus typically infects domestic poultry and wild birds such as geese, ducks, and shore birds. Each year, there is a “bird flu” season, and some forms of the “bird flu” are worse for birds than others. Wild birds, especially waterfowl, are a natural carrier for AI. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 is a strain of the virus that can have more severe outcomes for birds infected with this strain. This strain has been known to kill both wild birds and commercial poultry.

The HPAI H5N1 virus does not easily transmit from birds to humans. However, there have been more than 1000 human cases reported globally since 1997. Most people that have been infected in other parts of the world have been in close contact with live or dead infected domestic poultry.

An HPAI outbreak in wild birds or domestic poultry does not mean that there will be a human outbreak or a pandemic.

HPAI is caused by different strains of the influenza A virus than those that cause seasonal influenza (“the flu”) in humans.

Huron Perth Public Health, CFIA, OMAFRA and other agencies work together to monitor and respond to cases of HPAI identified in Huron/Perth.

The **animal health response** is managed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and/or the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA).

The **human health response** is led by public health by providing guidance to workers, employers and local physicians.

What to do now

Know the symptoms of HPAI

The most common symptoms of HPAI in people include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat

- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle and/or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue or tiredness
- Conjunctivitis (red eyes)
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

Less commonly, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting or seizures can occur. Diarrhea is more common with avian influenza than with influenza due to human viruses.

I don't have symptoms. Now what?

If you have **no symptoms** and you did have contact with poultry or equipment in a setting where HPAI has been suspected or confirmed:

- If you were wearing proper personal protective equipment (PPE) including an N-95 mask, continue to watch yourself (self-monitor) for HPAI symptoms. Keep watching for symptoms for **10 days after your last exposure to the poultry/equipment/areas of the facility not cleaned and disinfected**
- If you were **not** wearing proper PPE and had significant exposure to infected poultry or contaminated equipment/facility areas, HPPH recommends you see your doctor to discuss receiving the antiviral oseltamivir (Tamiflu). This medication may help stop HPAI symptoms from developing or reduce the risk of some complications if you become ill. The recommended course of medication is 75 mg of oseltamivir twice daily for ten days after the last direct contact with the birds or the contaminated environment.
- If you don't have a doctor, please call Health Connect (formerly Telehealth Ontario) by dialling 811.

I do have symptoms. What should I do?

If you have **symptoms** anytime in the 10 days after your last contact with poultry or equipment in a setting where HPAI has been suspected or confirmed:

- Self-isolate (stay at home unless you need medical attention) until your symptoms have ended. Treat your symptoms as you would for other respiratory illnesses such as seasonal influenza ("the flu").
- Report your symptoms Huron Perth Public Health at 1-888-221-2133 ext. 3284. After hours, please call 1-800-431-2054.
- You should get tested to see if you have HPAI. Please contact your health care provider, and they will arrange testing. If you do not have a health care provider, please call Health Connect (formerly known as Telehealth Ontario) by dialling 811.

- If you need to seek medical care (family doctor, emergency department), please call ahead and let them know that you have been exposed to HPAI and now have symptoms. Wear a mask when visiting your family doctor, emergency department, or other health professional.

I work with birds. How can I protect myself?

It's important to follow the Ministry of Health's recommendations on personal protective equipment. Complete information can be found at [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza: Recommendations for Personal Protective Equipment for Workers and Employers Working with or Around Poultry, Wild Birds, and Other Susceptible Species, including Livestock](#). If you have workplace health and safety concerns or questions, contact your employer.

Please note: if you are working in an area where HPAI is confirmed or suspected in the birds and your work includes working with live or dead birds, their feces, feathers, or bedding, or the cleaning and disinfection of contaminated surfaces or equipment, wear the following PPE:

- Fit-tested and seal-checked respirator (such as N95 or equipment with equivalent protection)
- Eye protection (tight-fitting non-vented safety goggles or full-face powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR))
- Disposable latex or nitrile gloves or reusable heavy-duty rubber gloves that can be cleaned and then disinfected
- Waterproof (impervious) disposable gown or coveralls. Covered zippers and taping of wrist cuffs are recommended.
- Boot covers or rubber boots that can be cleaned and then disinfected. Taping of ankle cuffs is recommended.

You should be properly trained on:

- How to fit-test a respirator, wear and use a respirator, remove a respirator, throw out used disposable respirators, clean and disinfect reusable respirators
- Who shouldn't use a respirator because they have certain symptoms or medical conditions (medical contraindications to respirator use)
- How to put on (don) and take off (doff) other PPE, as well as how to clean, sanitize and/or dispose of the equipment.

Be sure to follow the procedures you are shown. Also, wash your hands (perform hand hygiene) before putting on PPE, just before removing facial protection such as eye protection or masks, and after PPE has been completely removed. Whenever possible, always work outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.

Common Questions about Avian Influenza

How is avian influenza spread from birds to humans?

HPAI can be spread through contact with infected live or dead birds, their feces, feathers, or bedding, contaminated surfaces, or equipment. High-risk activities include caring for diseased birds, dressing birds that died from the disease, and working in close contact with poultry.

Who can be tested for avian influenza?

In Ontario, people who have symptoms of avian influenza and have had recent exposure to an infected bird or premises can be tested.

Is there a vaccine for humans against avian influenza?

Annual vaccination for seasonal influenza is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older, especially poultry workers.

How can I protect myself from respiratory illness (such as human influenza, colds, COVID- 19)?

Right now there are many respiratory viruses, such as seasonal influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) circulating in the community. Having one virus may lower your body's ability to fight off other viruses.

Here are some general guidelines for avoiding infections with other respiratory illnesses:

- Stay at home when you are sick
- Stay up to date with vaccinations (seasonal influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations)
- Wash your hands with soap and warm running water thoroughly and often
- An alcohol-based sanitizer (60-90% alcohol) should only be used if no visible dirt is present on the hands
- Practice proper cough and sneeze etiquette
- Wear a mask in crowded indoor public settings

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have any additional questions, please see [Avian Influenza](#). For more information regarding HPAI and human health, contact HPPH at 1-888-221-2133 ext 3284.

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