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NH-HAN 202501161



Department of
**HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

H5N1 Avian Influenza Update

Key Points and Recommendations:

- Review the [Background Information](#) below, and be aware that a CDC [HAN](#) released on 1/16/25 outlines one strategy for early identification of human H5N1 infections.
- Almost all of the initial patients with H5N1 infections had an identified exposure to infected birds or animals and presented with mild symptoms, including conjunctivitis as the most commonly reported symptom (see [NEJM article](#)).
- Ask any patient presenting with signs or symptoms of influenza (including conjunctivitis) about exposure to sick or dying animals (including wild birds, poultry, or livestock). For any person with compatible signs/symptoms AND who reports a relevant exposure history:
 - Isolate the patient and wear appropriate PPE per CDC [infection control guidance](#)
 - Notify NH Division of Public Health Services (DPHS) immediately by calling 603-271-4496 (after hours 603-271-5300)
 - [Collect the recommended conjunctival and/or respiratory specimens](#) for influenza virus testing, including expedited subtyping at our NH Public Health Laboratories (PHL)
 - [Initiate empiric antiviral treatment](#) and do not delay treatment while awaiting laboratory results
- Because H5N1 has not been identified in dairy cattle or people in New England, and there have been no recent detections in NH poultry flocks, the risk of unidentified H5N1 human infection in NH is very low. Therefore, NH DPHS is currently requesting clinical specimens from the following patients be sent to the NH PHL for subtyping:
 - Any patients (hospitalized or outpatient) who have undergone testing and subtyping (e.g., on a BioFire panel) and test positive for influenza A, but negative for H3 or H1
 - Severely ill patients hospitalized in the ICU for influenza, even without a known exposure history to sick animals

Background Information

Influenza A virus subtype H5N1 has been circulating in wild migratory bird populations in the U.S. since December 2021, which has led to introductions and outbreaks in [commercial and backyard poultry flocks](#) and [mammals](#). In March 2024, H5N1 was introduced into U.S. [dairy cattle](#) and has since been spreading between dairy cattle farms causing more than 925 outbreaks in 16 different states. There have been no H5N1 outbreaks identified in dairy cattle or commercial poultry flocks in New England, but H5N1 has been identified sporadically in backyard poultry flocks, including in NH most recently in January 2023.

Due to increasing human exposures to infected animals, there have been an increasing number of human infections, primarily due to occupational exposures to infected poultry and dairy cattle. There have been [67 total human infections](#) reported so far in the U.S. since 2024, including one death. Most of the human infections have been mild, including people presenting with only signs/symptoms of conjunctivitis (see [NEJM article](#)), but severe disease has been reported (see [NEJM Case Report](#) and [CDC media statement](#)). There is no current evidence of human-to-human transmission, but the more that virus circulates in bird and mammal populations, the greater the risk for virus adaptation for human transmission. Therefore, in an attempt to eliminate H5N1 from dairy cattle and reduce human and animal exposures, the USDA is implementing a [National Milk Test Strategy](#), which the NH dairy program will begin to implement at the beginning of February 2025.

For Additional Information:

<https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/hcp/clinicians-evaluating-patients/index.html>

- For any questions regarding this notification, please call the NH DHHS, DPHS, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at (603) 271-4496 during business hours (8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.).
- If you are calling after hours or on the weekend, please call the New Hampshire Hospital switchboard at (603) 271-5300 and request the Public Health Professional on-call.
- To change your contact information in the NH Health Alert Network, please send an email to DHHS.Health.Alert@dhhs.nh.gov or visit www.nhhan.org.

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Attachments: None