



Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (bird flu) Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ is too long, and I don't want to read it all! What should my takeaway be?

The threat of bird flu to the general public is low right now and there's not much you can do. Get your flu shot, don't drink unpasteurized milk, don't give unpasteurized milk or [raw pet food](#) to your pets, keep your pets ([especially cats](#)) away from wildlife, leave wild birds alone, and stay away from any livestock that look sick!

You can report sick or dead wild birds [HERE](#) if 5 or more birds are found at a single location. You should report sick or dead poultry or other domestic birds by calling [Mass Department of Agricultural Resources](#) Division of Animal Health at 617-626-1795.

What is influenza? What is the difference between seasonal influenza and avian influenza?

There are many different types of [influenza viruses](#). The seasonal flu is caused by certain types of influenza viruses, which are classified based on proteins on the surface of the virus, abbreviated H and N. You may have seen bird flu in the news called H5N1, whereas seasonal flu each year is commonly caused by H1N1 or H3N2.

Infection with influenza viruses causes an array of [respiratory symptoms](#). Infection with bird flu may cause some [additional symptoms](#) which are not as commonly seen with the seasonal flu.

What is the impact on humans and other animals?

The virus has spread through wild birds for many years but began to spread to poultry and mammals in recent years. There is a huge impact to the poultry industry. It is deadly to poultry and entire flocks can be wiped out in days, as there is no treatment for it. This will continue to make eggs more expensive and difficult to find!

In 2024, the virus began spreading between cows. When the virus spreads between animals that come in close contact with humans, we get "spillover" infections into humans. The virus can mutate with each of these "spillover" events. Historically, humans are most commonly infected with bird flu strains if they have direct contact with infected birds or the environments where they live. In this 2024 outbreak, humans have also become infected through close contact with infected cattle and milk from infected cattle but there has been no evidence of transmission between people.

Does the seasonal flu vaccine work against it?

The seasonal flu vaccine is not designed to provide protection against bird flu. It is still very important that you get your seasonal flu vaccine, especially if you are someone who may have frequent exposure to infected or potentially infected birds or other animals.

What is the H5N1 situation in Massachusetts?

There has been no evidence of H5N1 in dairy cattle in Massachusetts. The [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) and [Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources](#) have been collaborating to test milk from all dairy cattle herds 1x/month since August 2024. There have been no reported human cases of H5N1 bird flu in humans in Massachusetts.

There has, however, been evidence of bird flu impacting wild and domestic bird populations in Massachusetts. In late January, dead geese were found in [Plymouth](#) and on the [UMass Amherst Campus](#) which tested positive for H5N1.