



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Aging and Long-Term Support Administration
PO Box 45600, Olympia, Washington 98504-5600

February 18, 2025

ALTSA: AFH #2025-006
ALTSA: ALF #2025-005
ALTSA: CCRSS #2025-003
ALTSA: ESF #2025-004
ALTSA: ICF/IID #2025-002
ALTSA: NH #2025-005

**INFORMATION AND RESOURCES REGARDING HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA
(HPAI) / “BIRD FLU” AND BACKYARD FLOCKS**

Dear Provider/Administrator/Superintendent:

A strain of H5N1 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been circulating in wild birds around the world since late 2021. This HPAI strain has also infected domestic poultry, including commercial and backyard flocks, as well as several wild and domestic mammals, such as dairy cattle. Human infections with HPAI H5N1 are rare but not unexpected. According to the [Centers For Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), there have been 67 cases of HPAI H5N1 infection in the United States, although **there are currently no known cases of human-to-human virus transmission**. Most of these cases have been mild, often involving conjunctivitis and some flu-like symptoms. People can get infected from getting the virus in their eyes, nose, or mouth, or from inhaling contaminated droplets or dust. The risk of infection to the general public remains low; however, there is increased risk to people who come into contact with infected animals or their environments.

Residential Care Services (RCS) encourages all long-term care (LTC) providers to stay informed and aware of the evolving situation with HPAI H5N1, especially providers who have **backyard flocks** where residents/clients may have unprotected exposure to birds.

WHAT IS HPAI H5N1?

Often referred to as “bird flu” or “avian flu”, HPAI H5N1 is an influenza virus that:

- Circulates in the wild bird population, mostly in waterfowl, and is highly contagious for poultry, such as chickens, ducks, and turkeys
- Can infect other types of birds and mammals, and can spread from birds to certain mammals and from certain mammals to birds
- Can infect humans who have close, prolonged, or unprotected exposure to infected birds or animals or their environments

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- Has mostly infected people who have had this type of contact with:
 - Poultry, including the birds and their feces or saliva, or contaminated litter or dust
 - Dairy cattle, including the cows and their feces, saliva, or milk, or contaminated litter or dust

BACKYARD FLOCK OWNERS

There are many ways to [stay healthy around your flock](#) and [to help keep your birds from getting infected with HPAI H5N1](#). Public health experts recommend:

- Always wash your hands after touching or caring for birds.
- Designate shoes and clothes that you wear only around your birds. Keep designated shoes outside of indoor spaces.
- Keep birds outside in a secured enclosure where they cannot have contact with wild birds or other wild animals.
- Minimize stirring up dust, feathers, or waste when cleaning/disinfecting coops or cages and wear a mask in dusty environments.
- Do not allow visitors to have access to your birds.
- If you obtain new birds, keep them separate from your existing flock for at least 30 days.
- Cook all poultry products and eggs to a [safe internal temperature](#) to kill bacteria and viruses.
- Wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) if you must care for sick or dead birds.

Washington State Department of Health has the following resource showing recommended PPE items and how to use them: [420487 Prevent Avian Influenza- keep yourself and your family safe with PPE](#).

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY BIRDS MIGHT BE INFECTED WITH HPAI H5N1?

Birds infected with HPAI H5N1 can show many signs if they become infected, such as:

- Eating or drinking less
 - Discharge from the eyes or nasal openings
 - Decreased egg production
 - Ruffled feathers
 - Swollen, discolored combs or heads
 - Lack of coordination
 - Sudden death
- If you have sick domestic birds in your flock, contact WSDA's **Avian Health Program at 1-800-606-3056** or [report sick domestic birds online](#).
- Washington State Department of Health has additional resources available at: [Avian Influenza | Washington State Department of Health](#)

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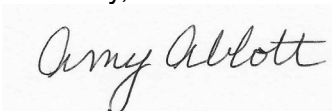
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- If you are concerned you or your residents may have had exposure to ill birds or have contracted HPAI, call your [Local Health Jurisdiction](#) for more information.

NOTE: Residents/clients should not be allowed to have exposure to sick or dead birds.

Thank you for your commitment to ensure the health and safety of your residents/clients. If you have any questions or would like assistance with further resources from RCS, please email ipc.epteam@dshs.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Abbott". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Amy Abbott, Director
Residential Care Services

DSHS: “Partnering with People”