

Avian Influenza Q and As

What are the potential routes for a highly pathogenic strain of avian influenza to arrive in North America?

Migratory birds usually travel thousands of miles over the same routes in their annual migrations. In the Northern Hemisphere, birds begin moving south during August and September of each year. North American migratory birds that spend the winter in Asia may come into contact with potentially infected domestic or wild birds during the winter months.

In spring, migratory birds will migrate north to their breeding grounds in eastern Russia, Alaska, and Canada. Migratory birds infected with the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 returning from Asia could potentially interact with other North American wild birds as they commingle on the breeding grounds.

Has the HPAI H5N1 virus been detected in the United States?

The HPAI H5N1 virus has not yet been detected in the United States in either wild or domestic birds. Should the HPAI H5N1 virus be detected in the United States, it does not mean the start of a human pandemic.

What is the Service's role in granting permits for research and control activities and in sampling for the virus?

The Service supports state surveillance efforts by ensuring that state wildlife agencies have authority under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to collect and sample any species of migratory bird.

The Service will be issuing to each state and territorial fish and wildlife agency director a scientific collection permit that will give them the authority to collect and sample wild migratory birds for avian influenza virus.

What if a wild bird infected with HPAI is found on a National Wildlife Refuge?

How we respond will be determined by the facts of the particular situation. Should it be necessary, refuge managers have the authority to close all or part of a refuge when public health and safety is at risk. As with any disease affecting wild birds, the Service and State Fish and Wildlife Agencies will closely monitor the situation with other partners such as the USGS National Wildlife Health Center, the agricultural health community and the public health community.

Should wild birds be culled if they are infected with HPAI?

Neither the World Health Organization, the OIE (international animal health organization) nor wildlife professionals recommend killing wild birds as a viable strategy to stamp out or contain

the spread of HPAI. Attempts to shoot or trap wild birds may disperse flocks and spread the virus to new areas.

Who has the responsibility to close migratory bird hunting seasons?

The Fish and Wildlife Service and State fish and wildlife agencies have the legal authority to close the migratory bird hunting season to protect public health in their jurisdictions. Based on what we currently know about the disease, we do not anticipate closing the upcoming waterfowl season.

Should hunters be concerned about avian influenza?

There are no confirmed cases of wild birds transmitting avian influenza to people.

There is currently no indication that waterfowl or other wild birds hunted in the United States carry HPAI H5N1.

While experts believe the risk to hunters is currently low, scientists cannot guarantee that there is no risk. It is always wise to practice good hygiene when handling or cleaning any wild game.

The USGS National Wildlife Health Center has issued guidance to follow routine precautions when handling wild birds (http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/publications/wildlife_health_bulletins/WHB_05_03.jsp.) The Center recommends that people handling wild birds:

- Do not handle birds that are obviously sick or birds found dead.
- Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning game, wash hands with soap and water (or with alcohol-based hand products if the hands are not visibly soiled), and thoroughly clean knives, equipment and surfaces that come in contact with game.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling or cleaning birds.
- Cook all game meat thoroughly (155 to 165 degrees) to kill disease organisms and parasites.

Is it safe to feed and/or observe wild birds?

At this time there is no reason to believe that backyard birds are a threat to public health. Highly pathogenic avian influenza has not been detected in North America.

As with handling wild birds, the risk of humans contracting avian influenza from feeding wild birds or visiting wetlands is very low. As a general rule, people should observe wildlife, including wild birds, from a distance. This protects people from possible exposure to diseases and minimizes disturbance to the animal.

As always, common-sense safety and hygiene practices are a good idea when bird watching or handling wild bird feeders or equipment.

As a general rule, the public should observe wildlife—including wild birds—from a distance. This protects you from possible exposure to viruses and minimizes disturbance to the animal.

Avoid touching wildlife. If there is contact with wildlife do not rub eyes, eat, drink, or smoke before washing hands with soap and water.

Use disposable or washable gloves when cleaning or handling backyard feeders, bird baths or other equipment. Wash hands thoroughly after handling.

Contact your state, county, tribal or local natural resource agency if a sick or dead animal is found.

To dispose of a dead bird, pick up the bird with an inverted bag or disposable glove, place the bird in another bag, and dispose of it in the trash. Wash hands with soap and water. Trash receptacles should be secured so that children, pets, wild animals do not have access to them.

Thoroughly washing hands with soap and water (or with alcohol-based hand products if the hands are not visibly soiled) is an effective method for inactivating influenza viruses, including HPAI.

Flu viruses are also inactivated with many common disinfectants such as detergents, 10 percent household bleach, alcohol or other commercial disinfectants. While the virus is more difficult to inactivate in organic material such as feces or soil, exposure to heat, direct sunlight and drying kill many types of bird diseases.

Stay informed of the changing status of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza and the risk it poses to people. If the disease is detected in North America stay informed of geographic areas where it has been detected and public health recommendations available at pandemicflu.gov.

For additional information on avian influenza pathology, safety guidelines, and efforts to monitor wild birds, visit www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/avian_influenza/index.jsp