

# H5 Bird Flu: Farm Worker Enhanced Prevention

A new *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* shows 7% percent (eight out of 115) of farm workers exposed to H5N1 bird flu during outbreaks among dairy cows in Michigan and Colorado had evidence of recent infection, including among several workers who did not recall experiencing symptoms associated with H5 infections. The risk to the general public remains low. However, given these latest findings, CDC reviewed its existing H5N1 guidance and, jointly with partners, has tailored recommendations to protect workers at the highest risk and contain the spread of the virus. [Spotlight on guidance changes.](#)

## How CDC is Addressing

- There are two primary ways that people in the United States are becoming infected with H5N1— via exposure to infected poultry during culling events and exposure to infected dairy cows during the milking process. CDC is enhancing existing recommendations to focus in on highest exposure risk tasks in poultry and dairy operations to prevent worker exposures and infections.
- To protect workers and prevent disease in these settings CDC and partners are working to:
  - **Decrease human exposure** to the virus through One Health control strategies and biosecurity to limit H5N1 infections in animals
  - **Offer tailored personal protective equipment (PPE) guidance** to farms based on risk and enhanced training and compliance activities ([updated guidance for employers](#), [updated guidance for workers](#))
  - **Identify exposed, symptomatic workers** and provide appropriate testing, monitoring, and treatment
  - **Offer post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and testing** to asymptomatic workers who reported not wearing relevant PPE or who experienced a PPE breach or failure ([updated guidance](#))
  - **Increase outreach and education** with farmworkers, employers, and advocacy groups to amplify these messages and strategies

The purpose of the updated guidance is to reduce the likelihood that a mild infection turns into a severe infection, or that the initial infection spreads to anyone else. The risk to the public remains low, and we have not seen any changes to the virus that would indicate a change in transmissibility. However, CDC is taking these steps to limit the transmission of H5 to humans, to keep workers safe, and to reduce the possibility of the virus mutating to better spread to and among people.

Farm owners should use the new CDC guidance on workplace controls and PPE to avoid additional human cases.

## Enhanced Prevention Details

- Decrease human exposure to the virus through One Health control strategies and biosecurity to limit H5N1 infections in animals
  - Reducing H5N1 in dairy cows and other farm animals through:
    - Additional veterinary testing
    - Continuing to collaborate with USDA and emphasize the importance of biosecurity and to support the work to decrease H5N1 infections in dairy cows



- Fewer farm animals infected with H5N1 means fewer opportunities for humans to be exposed and infected
- Offer tailored PPE guidance to farms based on risk and enhanced training opportunities
  - CDC will focus and amplify primary prevention strategies for workers with potential occupational exposures to animals or animal products affected by H5N1
    - PPE recommendations will focus on the most hazardous conditions to avoid H5N1 exposure
  - CDC's enhanced prevention package includes
    - On-the-farm training for effective PPE use in high-risk situations, including poultry culling operations and working in the milking parlor or with sick animals on an infected farm
    - Identifying where particular activities fall on the spectrum of low to high risk of exposure (risk stratification) in order to adjust PPE recommendations based on risk, with lower risk activities requiring less PPE
    - It is important to note that current recommendations for administrative and engineering controls, such as ventilation and hand washing stations to name just two, will remain in place, serving as the foundation of workplace controls to which PPE is added as a final layer of protection
- Identify exposed workers and provide appropriate testing, monitoring, and treatment
  - A key part of our ongoing strategy to date has been to offer the antiviral oseltamivir in occupationally exposed workers who develop symptoms consistent with H5 infection
  - CDC also recommends H5 and other pathogen testing to confirm H5 or other infections in symptomatic occupationally exposed workers
- Offer PEP and testing to asymptomatic workers
  - Asymptomatic workers who report a high-risk exposure will be provided with oseltamivir as PEP, but it should not be considered a replacement for PPE
  - Offer oral oseltamivir for PEP to exposed asymptomatic workers under the following work tasks or settings with high risk of exposure to HPAI A(H5N1) virus:
    - Oseltamivir PEP [twice daily x 5 days (treatment dosing)] can be given to members of poultry culling teams after high risk of exposure (e.g., direct or close unprotected exposure to sick/dead poultry) and to dairy farm workers after high risk of exposure (e.g., unprotected splash in the face with raw cow milk). An unprotected exposure could include breaches in or failures of recommended PPE
    - Longer duration of oseltamivir PEP (e.g., twice daily for 10 days) can be given for ongoing high risk of exposure (e.g., inadequate PPE) to infected animals
  - These workers are currently monitored for respiratory and conjunctivitis symptoms within a 10-day period following their last known exposure to animals infected with H5
  - **Testing guidance:** For the purpose of public health investigations and after consultation with state and local health departments during the current response to H5N1, offer a nasal/ oropharyngeal (OP) (+/- conjunctival) swab specimen test for influenza A(H5) virus using the CDC Influenza A/H5 subtyping kit to asymptomatic workers with high risk of exposure to HPAI A(H5N1) virus (e.g., exposed to animals infected with HPAI A(H5N1) virus who reported not wearing recommended PPE or who experienced a breach in recommended PPE).
- Increase outreach and education with farmworkers, employers, and advocacy groups to magnify message and strategies

- CDC is in the process of coordinating with a number of trusted partners who have the ability to reach farmworkers and their employers to help communicate and amplify these messages and prevention strategies
- Routes of communication will be through CDC's Rural Health group, HRSA, OSHA, USDA, the National Center for Farmworker Health, and the foundations and associations working with our local agricultural extensions
- Additionally, more targeted outreach will occur following our general announcements, with specific focus on key worker and employer groups and advocacy groups for Latinos.
  - Examples include [National Alliance for Hispanic Health](#), the [National Hispanic Medical Association](#), and [UNIDOS](#)
- CDC also will engage dairy- and poultry-specific producer groups
  - Examples include United Egg Producers, U.S. Poultry & Egg Association, Dairy Farmer Association, United Dairy Association, Fairlife Producer, Select Milk Coop, The National Milk Producers Federation, Dairy's Foundation, National Dairy Regulatory Officials
- Key messaging through various channels:
  - Email and media messages on new prevention recommendations
  - Roadshow where response leadership and staff meet with key groups to share and learn
- Collect feedback on target population needs and how best to improve outreach

#### Updated Guidance

- **New:** [Information for Employers Providing Personal Protective Equipment to Reduce Exposure to Novel Influenza A | Bird Flu | CDC](#)
- Updated: [Interim Guidance for Employers to Reduce Exposure to Novel Influenza A \(Such as H5N1 Bird Flu\) for People Working with or Exposed to Animals | Bird Flu | CDC](#)
- Updated: [Information for Workers Exposed to H5N1 Bird Flu | Bird Flu | CDC](#)
- Updated: [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Virus: Interim Recommendations for Prevention, Monitoring, and Public Health Investigations | Bird Flu | CDC](#)
- Updated: [Avian Influenza \(Bird Flu\) Resources | Bird Flu | CDC](#)

#### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Infographics

- [Medium Exposure Setting: Put On and Take Off PPE \(Español\)](#)
- [High Exposure Setting: Put On PPE \(Español\)](#)
- [High Exposure Setting: Take Off PPE \(Español\)](#)
- [High Exposure: PPE Overview \(Español\)](#)
- [High Exposure Setting: Put On PPE in a Milking Parlor \(Español\)](#)
- [High Exposure Setting: Take off PPE in a Milking Parlor \(Español\)](#)
- [High Exposure: PPE Overview \(Español\)](#)

#### Other Resources

- [H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation | Bird Flu | CDC](#)
- [Avian Influenza \(Bird Flu\) Resources | Bird Flu | CDC](#)
- [Avian Influenza Social Media Toolkit | Bird Flu | CDC](#)
- [H5N1 Informational Videos | Bird Flu | CDC](#)