



HPAI Update

Public Health Bulletin for Health Care Providers – May 2024

Dear colleagues,

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) or Influenza H5N1 is spreading across dairy and poultry farms throughout the country, including farms in Michigan. Only one human case has been identified this year in Texas, and this situation currently poses a **low risk to the general public**. No human cases of HPAI A(H5N1) have been identified in Michigan at this time. However, this is an issue we would like to highlight specifically for clinicians for the following reasons:

- Increasing numbers of impacted animals creates more opportunities for human exposure. Human cases could range in severity, but it is important that we identify even mildly symptomatic cases, to better understand disease transmission dynamics.
- As this virus has more opportunities to spread, especially across species, it has a greater opportunity for genetic mutation and reassortment.
- Testing of raw milk samples from affected cows demonstrates viral shedding, however, preliminary results from the FDA show that pasteurization is effective in inactivating HPAI.

In light of the above, we respectfully ask the following:

1. **Ask your patients with influenza-like illness about exposures** to birds, dairy cows, or other potential exposures.
2. **Individuals with compatible signs/symptoms plus risk factors should be tested for HPAI** - send samples to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Bureau of Laboratories (BOL) as described below.

3. **Have a low clinical threshold for starting antiviral medications***, such as oseltamivir, in patients with clinical symptoms and risk factors – even while testing is pending.
4. **Recommend seasonal flu vaccination for people working on poultry or dairy farms.** It will not prevent infection with avian influenza viruses, but it can reduce the risk of coinfection with human and avian flu viruses.
5. **Remind your patients of the risks of drinking raw or unpasteurized milk,** which includes potential exposures to pathogens like Campylobacter, Cryptosporidium, E. coli, Salmonella, or Listeria monocytogenes.

**If treatment is not clinically indicated, please don't let that deter you from testing. Case ascertainment is important at this time.*

Thank you for all you do to provide outstanding clinical care to Michiganders across our state!

Natasha Bagdasarian, MD, MPH, FIDSA, FACP
Chief Medical Executive, State of Michigan

Sarah Lyon Callo, MS, PhD
Senior Deputy Director and State Epidemiologist, MDHHS Public Health Administration

Background

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) or “bird flu” is continuing to impact Michigan’s wild birds and mammals, and now outbreaks have occurred in several [dairy cattle farms and domestic flocks](#).

The [Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development](#) (MDARD) has also identified commercial dairy and poultry farms that have recently tested positive for HPAI in Barry, Gratiot, Ionia, Isabella, Montcalm, Newaygo, and Ottawa counties. Identification of impacted farms is ongoing, and risk should **not** be considered limited to those geographies. Backyard flock owners should also monitor their birds for symptoms and deaths and follow [MDARD’s suggested biosecurity measures](#).

Assessment

Affected dairy and poultry farms have been working closely with federal, state and local officials to monitor the animal outbreaks, and to **detect and prevent animal to human transmission**.

Since 2022, there have been [two confirmed human cases of HPAI](#) related to bird and dairy exposure in the United States. According to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), current risks to public health are low.

However, it is important to understand and prepare for possible HPAI infections in humans, as infections [can range in severity](#).

Recommendation

Here are a few things we hope you will keep in mind as public health agencies continue to monitor the situation:

- Be aware that this illness is circulating in bovine and poultry species in the state.
- Consider the possibility of HPAI A(H5N1) virus infection in persons showing signs or symptoms of **conjunctivitis and/or respiratory illness** who have **relevant exposure history**.
 - **Relevant Exposure History** refers to:
 - Persons who have had contact with sick or dead birds, livestock or other animals within the week before symptom onset.
 - Considering if the ill person has prepared or consumed uncooked or undercooked food, including unpasteurized milk or dairy products.
 - Considering if the ill person had prolonged exposure to potentially infected birds or animals in a confined space.
 - Patients that present with [these symptoms](#) and exposures should **be tested for novel influenza infection**. Testing should be coordinated with local health departments and MDHHS regional epidemiologists. Then, tests should be sent to the [MDHHS Bureau of Laboratories](#) (BOL) to be quickly analyzed.
 - [Follow these recommendations to collect and submit specimens to the BOL](#).

- While there is no vaccine available for HPAI, the [seasonal influenza vaccine](#) can protect populations at risk of exposure to HPAI by reducing the risk of coinfection between seasonal and avian strains.
- **Antiviral drugs, such as Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and Zanamivir (Relenza)**, can be effective in treating novel influenza infection. Early treatment works best and may be especially important for people with a high-risk condition.
- Advise patients to avoid eating or drinking [raw \(or unpasteurized\) milk products](#).

If you have any questions, please contact MDHHS – Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., at (517) 335-8165; and after hours or on holidays at (517) 335-9030.

As a reminder, register with [the Michigan Health Alert Network \(MiHAN\)](#) to stay up to date with all Michigan public health alerts.

Additional Resources:

CDC:

- [Updated Interim Recommendations for Worker Protection and Use of Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) to Reduce Exposure to Novel Influenza A Viruses Associated with Disease in Humans | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#).
- [Sequence for Donning Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) \(cdc.gov\)](#).
- [Protect yourself from getting sick when working with cattle_complete \(cdc.gov\)](#).

USDA:

- [Microsoft Word - Updated FAQ_042424 \(usda.gov\)](#).

FDA:

- [Questions and Answers Regarding Milk Safety During Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Outbreaks | FDA](#).

Press Releases on HPAI in Michigan:

- [MDHHS, MDARD remind Michiganders about risks of consuming raw \(unpasteurized\) milk and milk products](#).
- [MDARD - Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Detected in Newaygo County Flock \(michigan.gov\)](#).

- [MDARD - Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Detected in Three New Michigan Dairy Herds.](#)
- [MDARD - Farmers, Backyard Poultry Owners Must Tighten and Heighten Biosecurity to Protect Their Animals from Bird Flu \(michigan.gov\).](#)
- View [more press releases from MDARD on HPAI.](#)