

**Animal Health Update: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1
Detected in Wild and Domestic Mammals Worldwide
4.11.2023**

Key Points

- The worldwide HPAI H5N1 outbreak is ongoing.
- Since October 2022, infection has been confirmed in 30 wild birds in Los Angeles County. More infected birds are expected to be identified as birds begin to migrate northward.
- The virus has infected not only birds, but mammals too, including over 150 wild mammals and six cats in the US and one dog in Canada.
- The global spread of HPAI H5N1 and the recent spread to a growing number of mammals has raised concern about the possibility of a future variant which could lead to human-to-human transmission.
- Report sick or dead birds, or suspect cases in wild or domestic mammals, to Veterinary Public Health (VPH) by calling 213-288-7060 or by completing [this report form](#) (for birds) or [this report form](#) (for mammals) and emailing it to vet@ph.lacounty.gov. The public may report dead birds using the VPH [online reporting portal](#).

Dear Veterinary Colleagues:

Bird Flu Outbreak Update

The global outbreak of bird flu (caused by highly pathogenic avian influenza [HPAI] Eurasian strain H5N1) is ongoing. As of April 10th, 2023, HPAI has been detected in 30 wild birds in Los Angeles County. While infections in poultry have been identified in other areas in the US, including California, none have been reported in Los Angeles County. Veterinary Public Health (VPH) is monitoring this situation, especially as we enter spring migration of many bird species.

Bird Flu Has Been Detected in Wild and Domestic Mammals

In addition, HPAI has been detected in both wild and domestic mammals worldwide. As of April 10th, 2023, USDA reports 154 HPAI infections in wild mammals across 23 states in the US¹. Affected species include foxes (60), skunks (34), seals (17), mountain lions (11), raccoons (10), bears (7), bobcats (6), opossums (3), a coyote, a dolphin, a fisher, a leopard, an otter, and a tiger. Three of these infections were reported in California - two mountain lions in Mono County and one bobcat in Butte County. Although less common, HPAI has also been reported in domestic animals, including one dog in Canada, three cats in Nebraska, two cats in Oregon, and another cat in Wyoming²⁻⁴.

There is currently no evidence of sustained transmission among wild or domestic mammals⁵. The infections are thought to arise from consumption of infected birds. However, establishment of a new animal reservoir for influenza viruses is a concern, thus any suspect cases should be reported to VPH (email [this report form](#) to vet@ph.lacounty.gov). HPAI in wild and domestic mammals can look similar

to other diseases, including rabies, with the most common signs being neurological (including seizures, ataxia, and tremors). Suspect cases can be discussed with VPH by calling 213-288-7060 or emailing vet@ph.lacounty.gov.

Recommendations for Pet Owners to Protect their Pets from Bird Flu

Pet owners can protect their pets from infection by keeping them indoors, preventing interactions with dead birds and wildlife, and not feeding undercooked or raw poultry.

Recommendations for Animal Care and Veterinary Staff Handling Sick or Dead Birds or Mammals

Currently, the risk of transmission of HPAI H5N1 to humans is considered low. However, there is evidence that H5N1 may infect humans in rare instances. Staff can protect themselves by avoiding unprotected contact and wearing recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) while handling sick birds or animals, carcasses, bird feces or litter, and surfaces or water that might be contaminated with bird feces (buckets, kennels, cages, bowls). Recommended PPE includes: respirator (e.g. N-95), disposable gloves, properly fitted unvented or indirectly vented safety goggles, boots or boot covers, disposable fluid-resistant gown or coveralls, and disposable head cover or hair cover. PPE should be put on and taken off in separate clean areas.

VPH Working to Set Up HPAI Testing at Public Health Lab

Finally, VPH is working to set up HPAI testing of birds and mammals at the Public Health Lab which will increase our surveillance. VPH will alert you when this is available.

References

1. 2022-2023 detections of highly pathogenic avian influenza in mammals. USDA APHIS | 2022-2023 Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Mammals. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-2022/2022-hpai-mammals>
2. Domestic dog tests positive for avian influenza in Canada. Canada.ca. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/food-inspection-agency/news/2023/04/domestic-dog-tests-positive-for-avian-influenza-in-canada.html>
3. 3 cats in the U.S. test positive for H5N1 bird flu. BNO News. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://bnonews.com/index.php/2023/04/3-cats-in-the-us-test-positive-for-bird-flu/>
4. Another cat in the U.S. dies of H5N1 bird flu. BNO News. Retrieved April 11, 2023, from <https://bnonews.com/index.php/2023/04/another-cat-in-the-u-s-dies-of-h5n1-bird-flu/>
5. Elsmo EJ, Wunschmann A, Beckmen KB, Broughton-Neiswanger LB, Buckles EL, et al. Pathology of natural infection with highly pathogenic avian influenza virus (H5NI) clade 2.3.4.4b in wild terrestrial mammals in the United States in 2022. BioRxiv. Preprint. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2023.03.10.532068>

Sincerely,

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