

Avian Influenza and Wildlife Rehabilitation



Avian influenza is typically a bird disease. Wild birds are a natural reservoir for avian influenza viruses, most of which do not present a threat to either the wild birds or to humans. Occasionally, a strain of avian influenza will mutate into what is known as a high pathogenic variety (HPAI). HPAI specifically means the virus kills 75 percent or more of the chickens inoculated with the virus. In even rarer instances, an avian influenza will mutate and affect humans.



The high pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI H5N1) is primarily a bird disease that is transferred from bird to bird through contact with infected bird secretions, feces (bird manure), and contaminated water or food. HPAI H5N1 has infected humans who have had direct, intense contact with infected sick or dead birds.



The HPAI H5N1 virus that is causing high mortality in poultry and wild birds in other countries has been identified in Asia, Africa, India, and Europe, but to date has not been found in North America.

Many scientists believe that HPAI H5N1 could arrive in North America through wild migratory birds, particularly waterfowl and shorebirds in the Pacific Flyway. Department of Fish and Game personnel are currently monitoring this and other diseases that could enter California via migratory birds.



Most people do not have the direct, intense contact with wild birds that wildlife rehabilitators have. Because of this intense, direct contact with sick animals, their feces and secretions, wildlife rehabilitators should take specific precautions to protect themselves and the animals they work with from exposure to avian influenza and other bird diseases.

Clinical symptoms of avian influenza (in poultry): Clinical signs of avian influenza in wild birds species is being researched, and has not been clearly defined. Clinical symptoms for domestic poultry has been established and includes the following:

Wild bird species are most at risk:

- ducks, geese and swans (Anseriformes)
- gulls, terns and shorebirds (Charadriiformes)
- perching birds (Passeriformes)

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production
- Soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs, and legs
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing, sneezing
- Lack of coordination
- Diarrhea

The following precautions are advised when handling sick birds of any kind:

- Wear disposable nitrile gloves (at least 5ml, non-powder version), goggles, and NIOSH N-95 mask (recommended) when handling sick animals or cleaning cages
- Isolate sick birds from all other animals
- Sanitize work area, food dishes, and other tools regularly
Use 1/4 cup bleach per 1 gallon of water or use 1 cup Lysol concentrate per gallon of water (it does not oxidize or fume)
- Wash hands between animals to prevent cross contamination
- Thoroughly wash hands, shoes, and clothes



Practice good, clean habits with wild birds in your care:

- Keep all wild birds away from food and water
- Keep pet bird away from kitchen and dining area
- Outdoor aviary should have solid roof and fine mesh panels
- Keep new birds away (1 month) to ensure disease free
- Clean food and water containers weekly
- Clean stuck-on matter with soap and water, then apply disinfectant. Let sit 10-20 minutes before rinsing and drying off
- Keep the birds away from areas of the home where family congregates to eat, play, sleep or prepare food
- Only the wildlife rehabilitator should visit the birds or step into the area where birds are kept
- Keep mammals and birds separated
- Avoid using disinfectants near birds – may be toxic to them
- Wear nitrile gloves (at least 5ml, non-powder version) when cleaning or working with the animals
- Wash hands thoroughly after cleaning or after handling the bird

Some birds are too ill to be rehabilitated or fail to respond to treatment. Several species of birds that fall victim to avian influenza die or must be euthanized.

For more information on avian influenza, go to:

www.dfg.ca.gov/avianflu
www.pandemicflu.gov

Occurrence of Avian Influenza by bird group

