

Health Information for People in Contact with Dairy Cattle Herds that Tested Positive for Influenza A(H5N1)

This document provides recommendations for people who have contact with cattle that are suspected or confirmed to be infected with avian influenza A(H5N1).

Background

- In March 2024, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported illnesses primarily among older dairy cows in Texas, Kansas, and New Mexico. The cattle were experiencing decreased lactation and low appetite.
- Samples from unpasteurized milk and nasal swabs from sick cattle tested positive for influenza A(H5N1). This is the same virus that has been causing highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) with illness and death in wild birds and commercial and backyard poultry in the U.S. since 2022.
- Dairy cattle continued to test positive throughout 2024. Starting December 2024, USDA implemented a national milk testing strategy to provide comprehensive surveillance of the milk supply and dairy herds to quickly identify states and herds that are affected.

Human health risk

The risk to the public from this virus is low. However, people who work on dairy farms and handle or care for cattle that have tested positive for influenza A(H5N1) are at risk of getting sick.

- Public health officials have been monitoring people exposed to influenza A(H5N1) infected birds for illness since outbreaks were first detected in U.S. in 2021 and people exposed to infected dairy herds in the U.S. since 2024.
- Sporadic infections in people that work with infected poultry and dairy cattle have been documented in the U.S. and other countries. Eye infections are the most common reported symptom in infected people, but severe respiratory infections have also been documented.
- Symptoms of influenza A(H5N1) infections range from mild (e.g., eye infection, cough, sore throat, fever) to severe illness (e.g., pneumonia).

We want you to be aware of the possibility of infection and provide instructions on how to protect yourself, even if the risk is low.

Prevention measures and personal protective equipment

Normally, biosecurity means keeping germs out. Now that cattle are suspected of being sick with influenza A(H5N1) or have tested positive on your farm, we want to keep the germs in the barn and keep you and your family healthy.

- Limit your contact with the infected cattle.

- Do not consume raw (unpasteurized) milk and raw milk products from cattle that are suspected of being sick with influenza A(H5N1) or have tested positive.
- Obtain a seasonal influenza vaccine.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) when working with ill or infected cattle.

PPE should include:

- Washable or disposable long-sleeved coveralls or dedicated chore clothes than can be machine washed.
- Rubber boots that can be disinfected or disposable plastic boots (replace if torn).
- Washable or disposable head covering (some Tyvek coveralls have an attached hood).
- Latex or nitrile gloves, but you may use cotton gloves underneath (replace if torn).
- Goggles.
- N95 respirator (mask) -- If an N95 is not available, use a KN95 or KF94 or surgical mask.
 - A face shield can be used to protect PPE in areas with such as the milking parlor where splashes to the face are likely.
- Employers should conduct a site-specific hazard assessment to identify potential exposures based on work tasks and location and ensure that PPE use doesn't create unintended hazards.

When working with sick cattle, you should:

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth while caring for infected cattle.
- Do not eat, drink, smoke, use the bathroom, or leave the animal area while wearing PPE.
- Leave all contaminated clothing and equipment at work. Keep your dairy work separate from your home life. Designate a space outside the animal area to put on and remove PPE and change clothes as you move from dairy work to your home.
- Disinfect any personal items (e.g., cell phones) that were brought into the animal area.

Removing personal protective equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) should be put on and taken off in a separate dirty-to-clean transition area. If using rubber boots, clean and disinfect the boots in the dirty area.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used to perform hand hygiene while removing PPE. Wash hands with soap and water once all PPE is removed and necessary items are disinfected.

PPE should be removed in the following order:

1. Remove soiled gloves and put on new ones or use hand sanitizer.
2. Remove goggles, respirator, and head covering (if separate from coveralls), and unzip coveralls. Dispose of respirator and head covering if disposable.
3. Use hand sanitizer.
4. Start removing coverall by taking off hood (if applicable) and pulling arms out, rolling it down from the inside out.
5. Fully remove and dispose of coverall and disposable boots stepping onto the clean side once you have removed the coverall/boot from each leg.
6. Remove and dispose of gloves (if still wearing them).
7. Use hand sanitizer.

8. Clean and disinfect reusable goggles and any personal items that were brought into the area.
9. Wash hands with soap and water.

Watch our [Removing Tyvek Coveralls \(Personal Protective Equipment\) \(youtu.be/7chY_I8EcI0\)](https://youtu.be/7chY_I8EcI0) video for a demonstration.

Public health monitoring

- If you've been in direct contact or working with sick cattle, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) will contact you to do a short interview about your interactions with sick cattle and to answer your questions. If you agree, we will contact daily to ask if you've developed any symptoms of respiratory illness, gastrointestinal illness, or eye infections until 10 days after your last exposure to infected animals.
 - You will receive an email with a link to a two-question survey on your monitoring days (if you would prefer to be contacted by phone/text, that will also be an option).
- If you develop symptoms and you agree to it, MDH will help arrange for you to be tested for avian influenza as well as more common respiratory illnesses.
 - Respiratory illness is a common symptom of a variety of illness and may not be caused by influenza A(H5N1)
 - The antiviral medication Tamiflu may be offered to you following a consultation with MDH and your health care provider.
- Contact MDH at 651-201-5414 and ask for the Zoonotic Diseases Unit if you have questions on human health risk from avian influenza and how to protect yourself.

Resources

For more information on risks to people from avian influenza, visit [CDC: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Virus in Animals: Interim Recommendations for Prevention, Monitoring, and Public Health Investigations \(www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/hpai/hpai-interim-recommendations.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/hpai/hpai-interim-recommendations.html).

For more information on the Minnesota Board of Animal Health response, visit: [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Response \(www.bah.state.mn.us/hpai/\)](https://www.bah.state.mn.us/hpai/).

The Minnesota Farm & Rural Helpline is free, confidential, and available 24/7 at 833-600-2670, or at [Coping with Farm & Rural Stress \(mda.state.mn.us/about/mnfarmerstress\)](https://mda.state.mn.us/about/mnfarmerstress).

[Minnesota Farm Advocates \(mda.state.mn.us/about/commissionersoffice/farmadvocates\)](https://mda.state.mn.us/about/commissionersoffice/farmadvocates) provide one-on-one assistance for farmers who face crisis caused by either a natural disaster or financial problems.

If you have questions or develop respiratory symptoms or an eye infection after working with sick animals, call 651-201-5414 and ask for the Zoonotic Diseases Unit.

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