

Avian influenza virus activity continues in California

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As the Eurasian strain of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 continues to impact wild and domestic birds across the state, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) wildlife disease specialists are reminding the public of steps they can take to help reduce the spread of infection. To date HPAI H5N1 has been detected in 34 wild birds from 13 counties including Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Mendocino, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Santa Clara, Siskiyou, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus and Yolo. The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) has also reported detections of HPAI H5N1 in domestic birds in Butte, Contra Costa, Sacramento, Fresno and Tuolumne counties.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza is contagious among birds, and domestic birds such as chickens are especially vulnerable. The strain of Eurasian HPAI H5N1 currently in circulation in the U.S. and Canada has been causing illness and death in a higher diversity of wild bird species than during previous avian influenza outbreaks. In particular, waterfowl, other waterbirds, raptor predators and avian scavengers such as vultures

and gulls have been affected. Unfortunately, infection in these species is nearly always fatal, and no vaccines or treatments are available.

Help reduce the spread of HPAI:

- Report dead wild birds to CDFW using the mortality reporting form. While it is not possible to test every wild bird for HPAI, all mortality reports are important and help disease specialists monitor the outbreak.
- Report sick and dead poultry to the CDFA hotline at (886) 922-2473.
- Prevent contact between domestic birds and wild birds, especially waterfowl.
- Exclude wild birds from accessing chicken or other domestic bird feed and water.
- Do not bring potentially sick wild birds home or move sick birds to another location.
- Before transporting potentially sick wild birds to wildlife rehabilitation centers, veterinary clinics or other animal facilities, contact the facility for guidance and to determine if the bird should be collected.
- If recreating outdoors in areas with large concentrations of waterfowl and other waterbirds, wash clothing and disinfect footwear and equipment before traveling to other areas or interacting with domestic birds.
- Where it can be done so safely, consider disposing of dead birds to help reduce exposure to new birds and minimize scavenging by birds and mammals that also may be susceptible to infection.

The Centers for Disease Control considers the transmission risk of avian influenza to people to be low, but as a general precaution recommends limiting contact with wild birds and sick or dead poultry. If there is a need to dispose of a dead bird, wear impermeable gloves or a plastic bag turned inside-out to collect the remains into a plastic garbage bag, which may then be placed in the regular trash collection.

Afterwards, wash hands with soap and water and change clothing before having contact with domestic poultry or pet birds. If assistance or guidance is needed with the disposal of dead birds on private property, contact your county environmental health department or animal services for options available in your area.

For more information on HPAI H5N1, check out CDFW's informational flyer addressing frequently asked questions and links to additional resources. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) maintains the official list of HPAI H5N1 detections on its website. For guidance on keeping domestic birds healthy, please visit the CDFA and USDA websites.

For guidance on orphaned or injured live wild birds, please contact your nearest wildlife rehabilitation center prior to collecting the animal. Be advised that some wildlife rehabilitation centers may have restrictions on the wildlife species they will admit.