

## **AVIAN INFLUENZA CONFIRMED IN THREE CALIFORNIA DAIRY HERDS**

### **Questions and Answers**

#### **Situation Summary:**

Cows at three California dairies located in the Central Valley began showing clinical signs consistent with highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) beginning August 23-25, 2024. Samples from these three sites were submitted to the California Animal Health and Food Safety (CAHFS) laboratory and found “presumptively positive” then submitted to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) for official confirmation. On August 30, 2024, NVSL confirmed HPAI in all three dairies. CDFA's preliminary investigation has confirmed that cows have been moved among these dairies recently.

#### **Is the milk supply safe?**

Yes. There is no milk or dairy product safety concern for consumers. Pasteurization of milk kills the virus, making pasteurized milk and dairy items safe to consume. Further, dairies must remove sick cows from the group that produces milk for the food supply. It is standard practice to move these animals to the part of the dairy set up for recovery.

#### **Is public health at risk? Are dairy workers at risk?**

No human cases of HPAI have been confirmed in California related to this incident. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is working in collaboration with CDFA and will work with local health departments to monitor any individuals who may be exposed to infected animals to ensure prompt clinical and public health interventions, and would provide official confirmation of any human cases associated with this incident.

According to [CDPH](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC), this influenza virus is not currently considered a significant public health threat and the risk to the general public is considered low. The primary concern is for dairy workers who come into close contact with infected dairy cows. As we have learned from recent cases in other states, these workers may be at risk of contracting avian influenza. Public health officials have experience working with agricultural partners and supporting farm workers working with infected poultry to prevent and monitor for infection over the last two years. CDPH recommends that PPE (masks, gloves, caps, face shields, and safety goggles) be worn by farm workers and emergency responders when working with animals or materials that are infected or potentially infected with bird flu. Earlier this summer, CDPH supported a one-time distribution of protective equipment for dairy farm workers and others handling raw dairy products, as well as slaughterhouse and commercial poultry farm workers. CDPH continues to support affected farms with PPE, while supplies last,

to dairies with confirmed positive cases. Furthermore, affected farms can take advantage of a USDA grant that provides financial support for producers that supply PPE to employees.

The [CDC has confirmed four human cases](#) of HPAI in dairy workers in other states since April 2024: one each in Texas and Colorado, and two in Michigan; all have had mild symptoms. CDFA is working with public health officials and dairy owners to inform and regularly assess workers for symptoms at the affected dairies in California, and to assist the dairies with education and resources to protect their workers, including providing personal protective equipment.

### **How did the cows get avian influenza?**

The mostly likely way for a cow to become infected with flu is exposure to other cows that are infected, but the virus can also be spread by dirty hands or shoes when people have contact with an uninfected animal after contact with an infected one, or by contact with contaminated equipment.

The HPAI virus has been detected in North American wild birds in the U.S. since 2022, with occasional transmission into domestic poultry or wild mammals in almost all states, including California. The detection of HPAI in cattle is not unexpected. In March, 2024, the first detection in cattle was confirmed in Texas, most likely due to a single spillover event from wild birds. Since that time, the USDA has linked new detections in cattle to the interstate and regional movement of infected or contaminated livestock, people, and equipment.

### **Are the dairies under quarantine?**

Yes. The dairies have been placed under quarantine on the authority of CDFA's State Veterinarian, and enhanced biosecurity measures are in place. Sick cows are isolated and are being treated at the dairies; healthy cows have been cleared to continue shipping milk for pasteurization. Animal movement is being tracked and evaluated, as are other potential introduction pathways. Additional testing will be prioritized according to epidemiologic risk. The investigation and response are ongoing.

### **How serious is this HPAI virus for California livestock herds and poultry flocks?**

CDFA is engaged with an extensive network of private veterinarians, farmers and ranchers, backyard bird enthusiasts, and local, state and federal partners to actively monitor for this disease in livestock and poultry throughout California. CDFA has taken

steps to reduce the risk of entry of infected dairy cattle into the state, has extensive experience conducting a rapid response to past detections of HPAI in poultry, and is fully prepared to respond to detections in cattle.

**Cattle:** Most infected livestock and dairy cattle fully recover from an HPAI infection within a few weeks. Dairy cattle can show clinical signs of infection such as reduced milk production; thicker, concentrated, colostrum-like milk; a decrease in feed consumption; abnormal, tacky or loose feces; lethargy; dehydration; and fever.

**Birds:** *No California domestic poultry flocks are affected by the current incident.* Avian influenza viruses continue to circulate normally among migratory and wild birds. When some strains, known as *highly pathogenic* avian influenza (HPAI), are introduced by wild birds into domestic poultry farms, they can result in very high mortality in those flocks. In those cases, the affected flocks/sites are placed under quarantine and extensive response activities and public/industry outreach efforts are conducted to eliminate those outbreaks and protect uninfected birds and flocks.

### **Are resources available for dairy industry stakeholders?**

The USDA has implemented or expanded a number of programs to support affected dairy premises. These include the [Dairy Herd Status Program](#) and [financial assistance](#) for the heat treatment and disposal of milk, veterinary costs, personal protective equipment (PPE), milk loss offset, biosecurity planning and implementation, and shipping cost offset for H5N1 testing.

Public health officials have experience working with agricultural partners and supporting farm workers working with infected poultry to prevent and monitor for infection over the last two years. The recommendations are that PPE (masks, gloves, caps, face shields, and safety goggles) be worn by farm workers and emergency responders when working with animals or materials that are infected or potentially infected with bird flu. Earlier this summer, CDPH supported a one-time distribution of protective equipment for dairy farm workers and others handling raw dairy products, as well as slaughterhouse and commercial poultry farm workers. CDPH continues to support affected farms with a limited supply of PPE, while supplies last, to dairies with confirmed positive cases.

## **Additional Resources**

This nationwide outbreak of HPAI H5N1 began in poultry in 2022 and was first detected in US dairy cattle in March 2024. All detections in cattle can be found on the USDA website under: [HPAI in Livestock | Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service \(usda.gov\)](#).

For the most up-to-date information regarding highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in livestock in California, please visit [CDFA - AHFSS - AHB - Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) H5N1 Virus in Livestock](#).

For public inquiries regarding highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) affecting domestic livestock and poultry in California, please call: 916-217-7517 or send an e-mail to [cdfa.HPAIinfo@cdfa.gov](mailto:cdfa.HPAIinfo@cdfa.gov).

For media inquiries, please call 916-654-0462 or send an e-mail to [OfficeOfPublicAffairs@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:OfficeOfPublicAffairs@cdfa.ca.gov).