

Avian Influenza H5N1 Bird Flu in California Dairy Herds
Questions and Answers
(Updated 01/13/2025)

Situation Summary:

This nationwide outbreak of H5N1 Bird Flu began in poultry in 2022 and was first detected in US dairy cattle in March 2024. On August 30, 2024, California confirmed its first cases of H5N1 Bird Flu in dairies located in Central California. Dairy herds that have fully recovered from the virus and meet all [requirements](#) will have their quarantines released. All quarantine released dairies will be automatically placed on a surveillance list for bi-monthly testing through creameries to maintain continued monitoring of the virus in California.

Is the milk supply safe?

Pasteurization of milk kills the H5N1 Bird Flu virus, preventing the spread of virus to humans through the consumption of milk and other dairy products. Pasteurization has the additional advantage of preventing foodborne illnesses from *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Cryptosporidium*, and several other dangerous germs that can pose serious health risks to you and your family.

Bird Flu in Humans

According to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), the risk of Bird Flu to the general public remains low, but additional human cases of Bird Flu are expected to be identified and confirmed in California. CDPH recommends that personal protective equipment (PPE), such as eye protection (face shields or safety goggles), respirators (N95 masks), and gloves be worn by anyone working with animals or materials that are infected or potentially infected with the Bird Flu virus. Wearing PPE helps prevent infection. Please see CDPH's guidance information at [Worker Protection from Bird Flu](#) for additional PPE information. For the latest updates from CDPH, visit [Bird Flu \(ca.gov\)](#). If you have any questions, comments or concerns, you can [submit an inquiry directly to CDPH](#).

How did the cows get Bird Flu?

The H5N1 Bird Flu 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 all 50 states.

In March of 2024, the first detection in cattle was confirmed in Texas, resulting from a single spillover event from a wild bird-origin virus. The single point sourced introduction led to a lateral spread (infected cow to healthy cow) of Bovine Influenza A across the U.S. The USDA has linked new detections in cattle to the interstate and regional movement of infected or contaminated livestock, people, and equipment.

The most likely way for a cow to become infected with Bird Flu is exposure to other cows that are infected. Cows may be infected for 2-3 weeks before they show clinical signs of illness. The movement of infected cows that appear healthy can contribute to spreading the virus to other farms, sale yards, and livestock auctions. The virus can also be spread by contaminated hands or shoes when people work with an infected animal then handle an uninfected animal.

Are the dairies with infected cattle under quarantine?

Yes. Dairies with cattle that test positive for H5N1 virus have been placed under quarantine on the authority of CDFA's State Veterinarian. Enhanced biosecurity measures are implemented to reduce the risks of the virus from leaving the quarantined farms. Animal movement is being tracked and evaluated, as are other potential introduction pathways. Additional testing will be prioritized according to risks evaluated by epidemiologists. The investigations and responses are ongoing.

How serious is this H5N1 Bird Flu virus for California livestock herds and poultry flocks?

H5N1 has seriously impacted California's animal agriculture. 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 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 and is rapidly responding to H5N1 detections in poultry based on their extensive experience with emergency responses in animals.

Cattle: Most infected livestock and dairy cattle fully recover from an H5N1 Bird Flu infection. 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. Dairy farms with infected cattle also pose a risk to neighboring poultry farms. There have been H5N1 detections on California poultry farms with links to infected dairy cattle within California.

Birds: Avian influenza viruses continue to circulate in 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 lead to very high mortality (death) 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. Earlier this summer, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) supported a distribution of protective equipment for dairy farm workers and others handling raw dairy products, as well as abattoir and commercial poultry farm workers. CDPH recommends that personal protective equipment (PPE), such as eye protection (face shields or safety goggles), respirators (N95 masks), and gloves be worn by anyone working with animals or materials that are infected or potentially infected with the Bird Flu virus. Wearing PPE helps prevent infection. CDPH continues to support affected farms with a limited supply of PPE, while supplies last, to dairies with confirmed positive cases. Please see CDPH's [Worker Protection from Bird Flu](#) for full PPE guidance.

Additional Resources

Avian

- CDC HPAI Updates: bit.ly/AvianFluCurrent
- CDFA Avian Health Program: bit.ly/cdfaahp

- CDFA Avian Influenza Updates: bit.ly/CalAvianflu
- CDFA Wildlife Mortality Reporting: bit.ly/CDFWreporting
- Defend the Flock (Biosecurity): bit.ly/DefendTheFlock
- USDA APHIS Commercial Flock Detections: bit.ly/HPAICurrentConfirmations
- USDA APHIS Wild Bird Detections: bit.ly/USwbHPAI

Bovine

- CDFA H5N1 Bird Flu in Livestock: bit.ly/cdfaLivestockHPAI
- CDQAP Dairy Visitor Biosecurity: bit.ly/cdqapDairyVisitorBx
- FARM Dairy Cattle Bird Flu Biosecurity Recommendations:
bit.ly/FARMdairyBiosecurity
- National Dairy FARM Biosecurity Homepage: bit.ly/FARMbiosecurityHomepage
- On-Farm C&D Milk Tankers Video: bit.ly/CD_MilkTankers
- Secure Milk Supply Enhanced Biosecurity Checklist:
bit.ly/smsEnhancedBxChecklist
- USDA Requirements & Recommendations for H5N1 in Livestock:
bit.ly/APHIS_HPAlinLivestock

For public inquiries regarding highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1 Bird Flu) affecting domestic livestock and poultry in California, please call: 916-217-7517 or send an e-mail to cdfa.HPAIinfo@cdfa.gov.

For media inquiries, please call 916-654-0462 or send an e-mail to OfficeOfPublicAffairs@cdfa.ca.gov.

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