

OPEX Awareness: DOE Biological Event Monitoring Team

This OPEX Awareness Notice is in support of the mission of the Department of Energy (DOE) Biological Event Monitoring Team (BEMT) to (1) ensure the safety and well-being of the DOE workforce; (2) support DOE continued performance of mission-essential functions; (3) contribute to the Federal response to biological threats; and (4) provide timely and accurate communication with stakeholders during biological events. The BEMT Risk Matrix has been developed to align with activation triggers and threat levels outlined by the U.S. Government Biological Incidence Notification and Assessment (BINA) protocol.

BEMT Risk Matrix	
L1	Non-Event
L2	Limited Health Event
L3	Significant Health Event
L4	Nationally or Internationally Significant Biological Incident
LR	Recovery

Based on available evidence, the current H5N1 Avian Flu risk level is **L1: Non-Event**. General information about H5N1 Avian Flu can be found below. Please stay tuned as we track the situation. As new information becomes available (e.g., human-to-human transmission is confirmed), the risk level will be re-evaluated and communicated.

H5N1 Avian Flu L1

INTRODUCTION

Recently, in the news, you may have become aware of increasing concerns about avian flu. **Avian influenza**, sometimes known as bird flu, is a disease caused by an influenza A(H5) virus that mainly affects birds but can also affect mammals, including humans. ***It primarily spreads from infected birds to humans through close contact with birds or contaminated environments***, such as poultry and dairy farms where animals are handled. There have also been reports of transmission from other infected animals (such as cows) to humans. Symptoms in humans range from mild to severe, and in some cases, can be fatal. *Respiratory symptoms, such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, and sore throat are more common*, but non-respiratory symptoms such as fatigue and muscle or body aches are also reported. Asymptomatic infection has also been found in humans with exposure to infected animals or their environments. A total of 28 people in the U.S. have tested positive for the influenza A(H5) virus since 2022 to date.

WHAT TO KNOW: Current Situation

- H5N1 avian flu is widespread in wild birds worldwide and is currently causing outbreaks in commercial poultry, backyard bird flocks, and U.S. dairy cows.
- While the current public health risk is low, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is monitoring the situation carefully and working with states to monitor individuals with animal exposures.
- The CDC is using its flu surveillance systems to monitor for H5N1 activity in people.
- An ongoing FDA study provides strong assurances that the commercial milk supply is safe.



- There have been several recent human cases mainly in U.S. dairy workers.
- In September, one human case was identified in Missouri with no known exposure to animals, which CDC is currently investigating.
- DOE is monitoring this public health situation closely.
- ***There has been no confirmed person-to-person spread.***

STAYING SAFE: Prevention and Treatment

General Practice: Follow ***good hand hygiene and food safety practices***. Maintain regular hand-washing with soap and water; avoid consumption of raw milk, egg, and meat products. *If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms, see your primary care doctor and tell them if you have had contact with any animals.*

Avoid contact where possible

- Stay away of sick or dead animals and areas where animals are kept or slaughtered.
- Avoid surfaces contaminated with animal feces.
- Do not slaughter or eat sick animals.

Background/Statistics

The first detections of H5N1 virus in dairy cows and unpasteurized milk samples from cows in Texas and Kansas were reported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on March 25, 2024. As of October 18, 2024, infected dairy cows have been detected in 323 herds from 14 states, including 124 in California. Since 2022, avian virus has been detected in commercial and backyard flocks in 48 states and has impacted over 100 million birds. USDA has publicly posted the genetic sequences of H5N1 viruses found in US wild birds, poultry, wild mammals, and cows in multiple states where infected herds have been reported.

For more information about avian flu, visit the CDC's website: <https://tinyurl.com/385vfx6b>.

Interim recommendations for Prevention, Monitoring, and Public Health Investigations are available at <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/prevention/hpai-interim-recommendations.html>.

Information about avian influenza is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/index.htm>.

The latest case reports on avian influenza outbreaks in wild birds, commercial poultry; backyard or hobbyist flocks; and mammals in the United States are available from the USDA at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/2022-hpai>.

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Questions regarding OPEX Awareness documents can be directed to oeq@hq.doe.gov.

***These numbers are as of 10/22/24. For the most updated information, visit [H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation | Bird Flu | CDC](#)