

January 10, 2025

Dear Veterinary Colleagues,

This is an important message from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAg) and Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) to all licensed veterinarians in the state of Connecticut. We are sending this message to update you on the current highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) situation and share resources. We ask that you share this information with your support staff and use these resources to assist you with questions from your clients regarding H5N1.

Background

As you are likely aware, the [pandemic](#) of H5N1 viruses in wild birds has resulted in outbreaks among commercial poultry and backyard bird flocks and has spread to infect wild [terrestrial](#) and [marine](#) mammals, as well as domesticated animals.

Since the spring of 2024, human infections have been reported in the United States, associated with poultry exposures or with dairy cattle exposures associated with the ongoing multi-state outbreaks of H5N1 virus among dairy cattle and poultry. To date, most of these poultry and dairy-associated outbreaks during 2024 are occurring in western and mid-western states, but all 50 states have had detections either in wild birds, commercial, or backyard poultry since January 2022. More information on human cases in the United States is available [here](#).

Connecticut had two poultry outbreaks during 2022 in non-commercial “backyard” poultry flocks (note that one of the two flocks had 160 birds), and the last wild bird detection was in February 2024. However, positive H5N1 detections continue to occur in both backyard flocks and wild birds in the Northeast. Most recently, a poultry flock in Vermont was confirmed in December 2024.

No additional H5N1 virus detections have been confirmed in wild birds, poultry, livestock, or domestic animals in Connecticut. Surveillance remains ongoing throughout the state.

Communications with poultry and livestock producers in Connecticut remain ongoing to educate and inform the agriculture community of proper biosecurity measures and resources available. Those interested in these communications may sign up [here](#). More information about detections of HPAI in animals in the United States is available [here](#).

New Developments

On Monday, January 6, 2025, [the first death in the United States was reported by the state of Louisiana](#) in a person who was infected with H5N1. The patient had exposure to both wild birds and a backyard flock. The patient had underlying health conditions and was over age 65. It appears the virus underwent mutations in the individual after infection. More information about the virus sequence can be found [here](#). As in other recent cases, no person to person spread has been detected, and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) continues to assess the risk to the general public as low.

Also, during the past month, H5N1 infections have occurred in domestic cats that were [fed raw diets](#) and in domestic cats [fed raw milk](#). Clinical signs in the cats were variable but progressive. They included fever, lethargy, dehydration, anorexia, icterus, respiratory distress, and neurologic signs (primarily seizures, although one had nystagmus). Consumption of H5N1 infected raw milk has been shown to cause severe

illness and death in mammals, especially cats. There have been multiple reports of deaths in barn cats living at dairy farms in impacted states with H5N1 outbreaks.

While these cases linked to raw food and raw milk have occurred in California and Oregon, raw dairy products marketed for pets, including frozen raw dairy products, may be sold across state lines, and are regulated differently than raw dairy products for humans. There are also unregulated products that may be obtained from unlicensed farms or individuals. It is strongly recommended not to feed any raw dairy products to pets. Freezing does not kill viruses and does not kill most bacteria. Frozen raw dairy products should be considered to carry the same level of risk for infectious disease exposure as refrigerated raw dairy products.

Actions Requested

As a veterinarian, you and your support staff may provide healthcare for poultry, either in a backyard or commercial setting, or you may provide healthcare for companion animals whose owners also have backyard flocks. You may provide care for companion animals whose owners feed raw milk or raw diets. We want you to be in a position to protect yourself and your staff and to provide risk information for pet owners.

Please consider the following:

- Counsel pet owners about the [risks](#) to both human and pet health when feeding raw dairy, raw poultry and [raw meat diets](#).
- Ask clients and staff to report wild dead birds to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). Information on reporting and FAQs from DEEP are available [here](#).
- Ask clients and staff to report sick or dead domestic birds to the Department of Agriculture (DoAg). Information on reporting and FAQs from DoAg are available [here](#).
- Identify potential cases of H5N1 in pets, especially cats, and report to DoAg. Consider H5N1 in any pet that had exposure to recalled raw milk or wild birds, especially in cats with fever, severe lethargy, icterus, hepatopathy, tachypnea, uveitis, or neurologic signs such as seizures, nystagmus, or blindness.
- Information for employers providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to reduce exposure to novel influenza A from the CDC is available [here](#).
- Veterinarians, veterinary staff, and animal health workers should wear appropriate PPE when having contact with sick pets that have history of exposure to raw milk/milk products or that are suspected or confirmed to have H5N1. [Considerations for Veterinarians: Evaluating and Handling of Cats Potentially Exposed to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Virus](#).
- Do not handle sick or dead birds without appropriate PPE.
- Veterinary facilities should be prepared to discuss reported cases with the CT Department of Public Health, provide medical records, and provide information about staff exposed to sick animals to facilitate monitoring and protection of employee health.
- If you are seeing a potential case of H5N1 in an animal:
 - Place the animal in isolation.
 - Limit the number of staff handling the animal as much as possible.
 - Instruct staff that handle the animal to wear appropriate PPE, which includes an N95 mask, gloves, eye protection, shoe protection, and a gown, at minimum.
 - Collect detailed information about the potential exposure to H5N1, including a detailed dietary history and any exposure to wild birds or other animals.

- Contact and report the suspected case to the State Veterinarian at 860-713-2505 or ctstate.vet@ct.gov.

As always, we are here for your questions and concerns. Misinformation is already out there, please rely on DPH, DoAg, DEEP, CDC, and United States Department of Agriculture to provide you with accurate and up-to-date information, which we will continue to share with you as this situation evolves.


Dr. Thamus Morgan, the State Veterinarian at the Department of Agriculture, may be reached at 860-713-2505 or ctstate.vet@ct.gov.

Dr. Kathy Kudish, the State Public Health Veterinarian at the Department of Public Health, may be reached at 860-509-7994 or Kathy.kudish@ct.gov.

Sincerely,

Thamus J Morgan, DVM, MPH, DACVPM

Kathy Kudish, DVM, MSPH

Handwritten signature of Thamus J Morgan in cursive script.Handwritten signature of Kathy Kudish in cursive script.