

## Bird Flu – Considerations for Pets and Non-farm Animals

Avian influenza, or bird flu, is a virus that causes disease in chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, ducks, geese, as well as other birds. There are many types of bird flu and some forms are worse than others. The H5N1 form of bird flu that is currently in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East is by far the worst known outbreak of bird flu in domestic birds. H5N1 is a fatal disease in domestic poultry, and it is easily spread from bird to bird.

The bird flu virus is spread through the bodily fluids and feces of infected birds. Wild birds, especially waterfowl and shorebirds, act as a natural host for the virus. They may not show signs of the disease, even if they have it. Some of the other species that could catch the bird flu virus include pigs, primates, ferrets, rodents, rabbits, cats, and humans.

If a cat eats an uncooked infected bird, the cat could become infected with the H5N1 virus. Infected cats may be able to spread the disease to other cats. Pet birds may be able to catch the virus if they are near infected birds or their secretions. Limited research suggests dogs may be able to contract the disease, but this appears less likely than in other species. The human risk of contracting bird flu from pets and other non-farm animals is minimal. No evidence exists of humans contracting bird flu from any animals other than birds.



The H5N1 virus has not been found in North America. Even if the disease is seen in this country, the risk of human H5N1 infection from pets or non-farm animals remains small. People can reduce their risk by using proper hygiene and biosecurity measures. These measures are also helpful in reducing the risk of contracting other diseases and parasites:

- Do not touch sick or dead birds.
- If a dead bird must be removed, use rubber or latex gloves, put the bird in two plastic bags, tie the bags shut, and dispose of per county regulations. Most counties allow disposal of a single small animal in the regular garbage.
- Limit exposure of pets to wild birds, water sources where migratory waterfowl are known to visit, and other infectious sources. In affected areas, keep cats indoors, avoid stray cats, and walk dogs on leashes.
- Do not allow pets to pick up, play with, or eat wild birds.
- Avoid attracting waterfowl. Do not feed ducks, geese, or other migratory waterfowl.
- Avoid contact with birds, feathers, feces, etc. when maintaining backyard birdfeeders and birdbaths. Use gloves when cleaning or refilling baths and feeders, and wash hands afterwards.
- Seek prompt veterinary care for any sick pets.
- After exposure to wild birds, feathers, feces, or other contaminated material, wash hands with soap and water or alcohol wipes/cleansers. Wash clothing and clean shoes immediately to prevent the spread of disease. Do not eat, drink, or use tobacco products before washing hands. Be aware of possible exposure in parks, petting or formal zoos, pet shops, etc.

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Adapted for use in Kentucky from: British Veterinary Association website: [http://www.bva.co.uk/policy/issues/pol\\_brief\\_avian\\_flu\\_cats.pdf](http://www.bva.co.uk/policy/issues/pol_brief_avian_flu_cats.pdf). Accessed on May 11, 2006.

Information contained in this document is accurate as of the date of the last update. Document last updated on: August 9, 2006.  
 For more information about pandemic flu, visit the University of Kentucky Pandemic Flu webpage at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/fcs/pandemicflu/>.

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