

# HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA

## BC WILDLIFE HEALTH FACTSHEET

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Information from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)

**Background:** Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI; H5N1) was first detected in Canada in the Atlantic Provinces in December 2021 and is now spreading across Canada and the United States. HPAI has now been confirmed in wild and/or domestic birds in all four North American flyways (Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, Pacific). With the northward spring bird migration, increasing numbers of HPAI detections may be seen across Canada. There have been recent cases of HPAI in wild and domestic birds in British Columbia. For current information on cases of HPAI in wild birds in Canada see the HPAI-Wild Birds Dashboard: [National Avian Influenza - Wild Positives \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

### What is Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza?

Wild birds and waterfowl in Canada and throughout the world are natural carriers of avian influenza viruses. Avian influenza (AI) is a viral infection that is highly contagious among birds and most strains of the virus cause little or no harm. However, these viruses can spread to domestic poultry and, under certain circumstances, to people. Avian Influenza is designated as highly pathogenic when it causes mass disease and mortality in infected poultry. For more information on AI, please refer to the Government of Canada's website: [Avian influenza in wild birds - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca)

### What are the signs of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza?

Not all infected birds appear sick. Signs that a bird may have HPAI include: nervousness, tremors or lack of coordination, swelling around the head, neck and eyes, lack of energy or movement, coughing, gasping for air or sneezing, diarrhea, or sudden death.

If you observe sick or dead birds and suspect that disease may be involved, contact the **BC Wild Bird Mortality Line at 1-866- 431-2473**. Please include the date, location, species and how many sick or dead birds were recorded in your observation.

### What is the risk to humans?

The risk of HPAI (H5N1) infection in the general public is considered low. In general, human cases of avian influenza are caused by close, prolonged contact with infected live or dead poultry or contaminated environments. There is no evidence to suggest that the avian influenza virus can be transmitted to humans through the consumption of fully cooked game birds or eggs, however, individuals should be cautious when handling wild birds and follow the guidance provided on the Government of Canada's website: [Avian influenza in wild birds - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca)

As a general guideline, members of the public should not handle dead wild birds or live birds **that are acting strangely**. If contact with wild birds is unavoidable:

- Wear any available personal protective equipment (PPE) on hand (i.e. gloves, mask, eye protection)
- Pick up carcass with gloves or use a doubled plastic bag

- Avoid contact with blood, body fluids and feces
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water

#### **Can I feed wild birds?**

- **Do not feed wild birds by hand**
- Feeders at or near poultry operations / domestic animals should be removed
- Backyard bird feeders and baths should be cleaned regularly using solutions of 25ml bleach to 2L water (1:80 dilution), rinsed and let dry

#### **Other useful links:**

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC):

Wild birds and avian influenza – Handling guidelines (English): <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/flu-influenza/fact-sheet-guidance-on-precautions-handling-wild-birds.html>

Les oiseaux sauvages et la grippe aviaire - Conseils généraux sur la manipulation (French): <https://www.canada.ca/fr/sante-publique/services/grippe-influenza/fiche-renseignements-conseils-generaux-precautions-a-prendre-lorsqu-on-manipule-oiseaux-sauvages.html>

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC):

Avian influenza in wild birds (English): <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/migratory-game-bird-hunting/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza.html>

Influenza aviaire chez les oiseaux sauvages (French): <https://www.canada.ca/fr/environnement-changement-climatique/services/chasse-oiseaux-migrateurs-gibier/virus-influenza-aviaire-hautement-pathogene.html>

Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA):

Avian influenza (bird flu) (English) <https://inspection.canada.ca/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/diseases/reportable/avian-influenza/eng/1323990856863/1323991018946>

Influenza aviaire (grippe aviaire) (French) <https://inspection.canada.ca/sante-des-animaux/animaux-terrestres/maladies/declaration-obligatoire/influenza-aviaire/fra/1323990856863/1323991018946>