



Updated November 6, 2023

## **Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in Wisconsin:** **Frequently Asked Questions**

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) will continue to update the following questions, in partnership with federal, state, and local partners.

### **Learn more about HPAI**

DATCP has more information and resources available at [hpa.wi.gov](http://hpa.wi.gov).

If you have additional questions, contact [DATCPmediainquiries@wi.gov](mailto:DATCPmediainquiries@wi.gov) or [sign up to receive email updates](#) about HPAI in Wisconsin.

### **How can I protect my poultry?**

DATCP continues to encourage everyone in Wisconsin working with or around poultry to practice enhanced biosecurity measures to protect their flocks, including:

- Sanitizing equipment and clothing used around your flock.
- Protecting your flock from contact with wild birds.
- Restricting access to your property and keeping your birds away from other birds.

To learn more, see the biosecurity section of the DATCP's [HPAI in Wisconsin page](#).

### **What are the clinical signs of HPAI?**

- Sudden death, possibly without clinical signs
- Decrease in egg production or soft-shelled/misshapen eggs
- Nasal discharge, coughing, sneezing
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Difficulty breathing
- Stumbling, falling
- Diarrhea



Have questions or concerns about HPAI? Call DATCP's avian influenza response line at (608) 224-4902.

### **What should I do if I observe HPAI symptoms in my poultry?**

To report increased mortality or signs of illness among domestic birds, contact DATCP at (608) 224-4872 (*business hours*) or (800) 943-0003 (*after hours and weekends*).

## **What should I do if I find a sick or dead wild bird?**

You can [report sick or dead wildlife](#) (including birds) to the DNR. Depending on the type of bird, the DNR may arrange to pick up the bird or instruct you to discard it. As a general precaution, avoid direct contact with wild birds whenever possible. Avoid touching any wild birds showing [signs of HPAI](#), and do not touch dead birds or wildlife with your bare hands. If you must touch a dead bird, wear gloves or use a plastic bag to put it in the garbage. Wash your hands with soap and water, and throw away any gloves after disposing of dead birds or wildlife.

## **How many facilities have tested positive for HPAI in Wisconsin?**

A listing of all detections – including the county, date and number of birds – is updated on a regular basis at [hpai.wi.gov](http://hpai.wi.gov).

## **Has HPAI been detected in the wild bird population?**

Yes. HPAI has been detected in the wild bird population in several states, including Wisconsin. Birds can carry the disease to new areas when migrating, potentially infecting domestic poultry. Additional avian influenza detections may occur as wild birds migrate.

USDA APHIS is conducting [wild bird surveillance](#), which serves as an early warning system for the introduction and distribution of avian influenza. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has also implemented enhanced wild bird surveillance in Wisconsin.

## **How are wild bird populations monitored?**

The DNR is collaborating with federal partners by enhancing surveillance efforts. In addition to the normal morbidity and mortality investigations of five or more sick or dead birds of any species, the DNR is monitoring for possible incidents of EA H5 HPAI by focusing increased efforts on species that have been shown to be more likely to carry or be susceptible to disease from this strain.

Although there are no clinical signs specific to this HPAI strain, some affected birds may show neurologic signs. The public is asked to report any waterfowl, waterbird, raptor (especially bald eagles) or avian scavenger (crows, ravens, gulls) showing signs such as swimming or walking in circles, tremors, or holding the neck and head in an unusual position. Reports should be made to DNR Wildlife Hotline by email to [DNRWildlifeSwitchboard@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DNRWildlifeSwitchboard@wisconsin.gov) or by phone at (608) 267-0866. Leave a message with the number of animals; the species; if they were sick or dead; the specific location where you saw them, including county; and the contact details of the person reporting so that staff can return a call. [More information is available on the DNR website.](#)

## **How does avian influenza spread?**

Birds act as hosts to influenza viruses by carrying the virus in their intestines and shedding it in bodily fluids, such as saliva, nasal secretions and feces. Other birds become infected when they come in contact with these fluids.

Humans can become infected through contact with infected poultry or contaminated fluids. Avian influenza has not mutated to a point where it could easily spread from person-to-person. It's difficult to predict if – or when – that might happen. People who have gotten sick with avian influenza have been in direct contact with infected birds.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HPAI does not present an immediate public health concern. For more information, see the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) [avian influenza webpage](#).

### **Will HPAI enter the food system?**

Birds/eggs from the affected flocks will not enter the food system. HPAI does not pose a food safety risk; properly handling and cooking poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165°F kills the virus.

### **What happens to the birds after depopulation?**

This depends on a several factors, including flock size and location. For large volumes of bird carcasses, composting is the most efficient and environmentally responsible method for disposal. Compost piles are constructed in a manner that includes a thick cover of compost carbon (e.g., wood chips) to eliminate the possibility of wild birds landing on the pile and carrying virus to new locations.

Compost piles are regularly inspected by staff from the farm, DNR, and DATCP for any evidence of leakage, odor and disruption. The full composting process takes approximately 30 days from final construction and involves daily monitoring to ensure the compost is reaching the optimum temperature to deactivate the virus. Windrows will reach temperatures exceeding 130°F for at least 72 hours and is sufficient to inactivate many pathogens, including avian influenza.

After the composting process is complete and the compost has been released by DATCP, the compost will be removed from the premises at the discretion of the landowner.

DATCP has resources on composting, including resources from the University of Minnesota, Iowa State University, and Cornell University, on the [Livestock Carcass Disposal webpage](#).

### **Why is composting selected over other disposal methods?**

Composting is the safest and most effective way to handle large volumes of carcasses. The composting process deactivates the virus while minimizing odor and generation of liquids into the ground. Although some materials will go to landfills, landfills can generally only accept a limited amount of carcass material.

Rendering, burial, open-air burning and landfilling have been means of disposal but are becoming less practical. Burial and open-air burning create biosecurity hazards and threats to water and air quality. To mitigate the spread of HPAI and safely dispose of the carcasses as soon as possible, and due to the proximity and capability of incinerators in Wisconsin, incineration is rarely an option.

### **What happens on a compost site?**

Material is laid out in windrows, which are long rows of composting material. Each windrow includes a mixture of carbon (mostly woody/mulch materials) under, around, and on top of the carcasses to create the appropriate environment for effective composting. Encasing and topping the carcasses with at least 1 foot of the carbon layer encourages the higher temperatures that speed decomposition, absorbs odors, and provides additional protection against water penetrating to the area of the windrow where the carcasses have been placed.

For more information, see DATCP's [Livestock Carcass Disposal webpage](#).

### **What is the risk of getting bird flu (avian influenza) from groundwater?**

The risk of being infected with HPAI from groundwater is extremely low. There has never been a documented outbreak of HPAI from infected groundwater, and there has been no evidence of live viruses capable of infecting humans or animals.

Composting rapidly deactivates HPAI and other pathogens when target temperatures are reached within the compost piles. Additionally, safety standards for composting sites are designed to prevent contamination of groundwater with HPAI and other byproducts of the composting process. These safety measures include proper construction of compost windrows to minimize the generation of liquids, and ensuring adequate distances are maintained from the compost site to well-water supplies, residences, and other bodies of water. See the [EPA pandemic influenza fact sheet for water](#) and the [CDC prevention and transmission of bird flu](#) webpage for more information.

### **How can I make sure my water is safe to drink?**

If your water comes from a private well, you should [test your water](#) at least once a year for contaminants like bacteria, nitrates and arsenic. If you suspect there is [a problem with your water](#), or are concerned about contamination, you shouldn't wait to test your water. Although routine testing will not detect influenza viruses, the presence of bacteria should be addressed with appropriate action to treat or disinfect your well. Annual testing of your well allows you to know your baseline levels so that any changes to your water quality can be recognized. You can find a list of certified labs that perform well water testing on the [DNR website](#).

Additional resources:

- [DNR: Information for private well owners](#)
- [DHS: Testing recommendations for private well owners](#)

### **How is HPAI monitored in the affected area?**

An affected premises is not allowed to move poultry or poultry products, and birds on the property are depopulated to prevent spread of the disease. Birds from affected flocks do not enter the food system. Poultry premises within 10 kilometers (6.1 miles) of the farm are monitored for the virus.