

What Is Avian Flu?

The H5N1 avian flu is a contagious virus that affects birds differently depending on the species. Some bird species, such as poultry birds, experience severe illness and death while others, such as wild birds and waterfowl, can typically spread avian flu but don't fall ill from it.

The current spread of H5N1 involves a strain that has been designated as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). This designation is made when the H5N1 strain causes widespread illness and death among poultry.

This (HPAI) strain was first detected in North America in December 2021 in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The current outbreak of this particular strain of avian flu has hit some wild bird populations harder than in previous outbreaks, causing more severe illness and death among raptors, vultures and some waterfowl species.

For more detailed information about avian flu, please visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency [avian flu fact sheet](#).

How Our Clinic Is Responding

Avian flu is a reportable disease. This means that once it is detected it must be reported to the federal government as the goal is to eradicate avian flu in the country. The Canadian government's response includes euthanizing all animals who have been infected or exposed to this strain of (HPAI) avian flu.

In order to keep your birds and our resident birds safe, our clinic has stopped seeing any type of high risk avian wildlife and birds who are housed outside (e.g. falcons, owls, pigeons, poultry, etc.).

How To Keep Your Bird Safe

Simply put, keep your pet birds inside. Do not take your birds to the park, or even out into the backyard. If your bird(s) have any contact with wild birds and/or their droppings, that puts them at risk for becoming infected with bird flu. We strongly encourage you to keep your birds indoors for the foreseeable future in order to prevent them from having possible contact with wild birds and/or their droppings.

Additionally, people should take precautions when visiting green areas like parks or other areas where wild birds may congregate, to avoid tracking virus back to their homes on their shoes and clothing. It is advisable to keep your outdoor shoes and clothes separate from those worn indoors.

Bird Feeders and Baths

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) currently says bird feeders should be removed from areas that are accessible to poultry and other domestic animals, but it says that the use of bird feeders generally is still safe. ECCC says if you are going to continue the use of bird feeders, they should be cleaned regularly with a weak domestic bleach solution (one part bleach to nine parts water), rinsed thoroughly and dried before they are filled again.

Do not feed bird populations by hand (e.g. ducks and pigeons) as doing so encourages wild bird populations to congregate in one area.

ECCC says bird baths are still generally safe. But the ECCC says bird baths should also be cleaned regularly with a weak domestic bleach solution (one part bleach to nine parts water) and rinsed thoroughly before they are used again.

Can Bird Flu Infect Humans and Other Animals?

While the number of non-avian species who have been infected with bird flu is very low, this strain of bird flu has been found in some mammals, including humans, ferrets, rats, mice, weasels, cats, dogs and pigs. Recently, the University of Guelph reported that two juvenile red foxes near London, Ontario died from bird flu, presumably from eating a dead bird or birds infected with this HPAI strain of the virus.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency says for healthy people who are not in regular contact with infected birds, this bird flu strain should not be the cause of much concern.

If you have cats, please keep them indoors in order to minimize their contact with infected or dead birds and to eliminate the chance that they will bring an infected bird to your home.

For more information on avian flu and pets, please visit the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency web site](#).

If You Find A Sick Or Dead Bird

It is strongly advised that the general public does not handle any sick or dead wild birds. Instead, please call the Ontario regional center of the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative at 1-866-673-4781 or visit their web site where you can fill out an [online report](#).

The government of Canada offers some [tips](#) on what to do if handling wild birds is unavoidable.

