

National Bulletin: 190-25-6

Date: 1/24/2025

ECS–Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Disease  
**Subject:** Summary, Response, Policy Reminders, and  
Additional Resources

**Purpose:** This national bulletin summarizes the current highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) disease situation, federal response, NRCS policy reminders, and additional resources.

**Expiration Date:** September 30, 2025.

**Background:** Avian influenza is a virus that spreads mostly among wild, migratory aquatic birds with waterfowl and shorebirds considered natural hosts. The virus occasionally appears all over the world often infecting wild and domestic birds and mammals. Transmission may occur from direct contact with infected animals, or it may spread indirectly through secretions or feces of infected animals. Strains of the virus are generally grouped into two categories based on their potential to cause disease: low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) and HPAI. Since 2022, an H5N1 strain of HPAI has resulted in the loss of millions of birds from both commercial and backyard flocks in the United States. In addition, HPAI (H5N1) was identified in a U.S. dairy herd for the first time in March 2024. Besides dairy cattle, the disease has been detected in other types of mammals including humans.

**Explanation:** The spread of HPAI (H5N1) remains a global concern requiring the cooperation of federal and state agencies, industry, and agricultural producers to prevent and control the spread of the disease across the nation. Following is a summary of the impacts of the disease on livestock commonly encountered by NRCS, actions taken by federal agencies to date, and resources available to stay current with new developments.

### Poultry

On February 8, 2022, HPAI (H5N1) was confirmed by USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) in a commercial flock. Since then, 127.64 million birds have been affected in 1,349 flocks across all 50 states. As of December 27, 2024, the disease has been found in 107 flocks in 24 states (current information can be found on the [APHIS HPAI dashboard](#) for poultry). There is no treatment for HPAI in poultry; once detected in a flock, the facility is placed under quarantine with the goal of depopulation within 24-48 hours. Disposal of carcasses include composting, burial, landfill, rendering, or incineration.

### Dairy

On March 25, 2024, the Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the Department of Health and Human Services, and USDA APHIS confirmed HPAI (H5N1) in dairy cattle. As of December 27, 2024, there have been 901 confirmed cases across 16 states (current information can be found on the [APHIS HPAI dashboard](#) for livestock). Lactating cows appear to be affected most often with common symptoms of decreased milk production, reduced appetite, and abnormal appearance of milk.

On April 24, 2024, a [Federal Order](#) was issued, requiring the testing of lactating dairy cattle before interstate movement and mandatory reporting of positive test results to APHIS. Certain states have also placed restrictions on importation of dairy cattle in addition to the federal requirements.

Evidence is growing that milk is a major transmission route of disease spreading from bovine-to-bovine or bovine-to-cat on dairy farms. As a result, APHIS announced a second [Federal Order](#) on December 6, 2024, requiring the collection and testing of raw (unpasteurized) milk samples in the contiguous United States. This order includes a National Milk Testing Strategy (NMTS) beginning with monitoring at dairy processing facilities and ramping up as needed to identify affected herds.

### Other Mammals

Since the outbreak in dairy cattle in March 2024, dozens of cats have contracted the virus, including domestic cats and big cats in zoos and the wild (e.g., mountain lions, tigers, leopards, and bobcats). Cats appear to be prone to severe illness often resulting in death. Food sources, such as unpasteurized milk, undercooked meat, and infected birds have been suspected of spreading infection.

One case of HPAI (H5N1) in swine has been confirmed, although it should be noted that the detection was from a backyard (noncommercial) operation where livestock and poultry were commingled.

Besides dairy cattle, swine, domestic cats, and big cats, HPAI (H5N1) has been detected in numerous other species of mammals, including wild mink, bears, canines (e.g., coyote and red fox), raccoons, opossum, seals, dolphins, and others. Refer to the [APHIS HPAI dashboard](#) for more information on the wild animals and locations of detection.

### Humans

HPAI is a zoonotic disease that can occasionally spread from animals to people, primarily through direct contact with infected poultry, dairy cattle, or other animals. Based on current available information, the CDC continues to consider the risk of HPAI to the general public low. Refer to the CDC website for information regarding avian influenza ([H5 bird flu](#)).

### Policy Reminders and Additional Resources

- To minimize the potential spread of the HPAI (H5N1) virus and other pests and diseases, employees must ensure compliance with biosecurity policy outlined in Title 130 General Manual, Part 403 “Biosecurity Preparedness and Response.” Particular attention should be given to NRCS Biosecurity Levels defined in the policy when making decisions about visits to farming operations.
- Visits to any facility with confirmed HPAI (H5N1) must be treated as a level 3 site visit as defined by NRCS policy. Coordination with state and federal officials should occur before visiting an infected site.

- States and territories should be familiar with the status of HPAI (H5N1) detections and consult with state animal health officials (SAHO), department of agriculture, or other local officials when necessary. Refer to the U.S. Animal Health Association for a current list of [SAHOs](#) or the APHIS website for a list of [area veterinarians in charge \(AVIC\)](#).
- APHIS and state veterinarians are the leads for any disposal and response. NRCS staff may be requested to provide technical assistance. In these cases, NRCS and APHIS protocols for personal protective equipment (PPE) should be followed.
- [Web Soil Survey](#) provides several interpretations for disaster planning including suitability for burial of mortalities (pit, trench, and shallow), incineration, composting, and milk disposal. Direct requests for additional information to the state soil scientist or designee.
- Wearing appropriate PPE will help minimize exposure and spread of the disease. States should ensure that PPE is on hand for staff.
- Each time a farm visit is made, the visitor logbook must be completed to allow for any necessary notifications.
- Reimbursement for car washes must follow the process in FPAC-P FMD-005 or its newest version. Reimbursement requests are made through the FPACNOW APT portal using the OF-1164. Follow the steps in [120 GM Part 406 Subpart P](#) to make a request.
- Clients with concerns related to HPAI (H5N1) should be directed to their local veterinarian or state agricultural department for additional guidance and information.

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