

Avian influenza in BC for individuals in close contact with poultry

October 2024



Avian influenza and human health

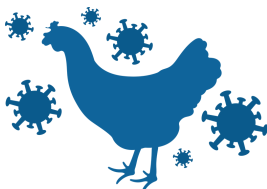
Avian influenza virus easily spreads from bird to bird. It can also infect a wide range of other wild and domestic animals such as cows, goats, skunks, and cats.

Avian influenza can also infect people. The symptoms are similar to the regular (human) flu. Infections may cause mild symptoms or severe outcomes.

When an individual is **co-infected with two influenza strains**, for example avian influenza and a human influenza virus, the strains can exchange genes. This exchange can create a new strain that could spread more easily between people and may cause a range of illness including mild symptoms or severe outcomes. This sort of scenario has caused previous human influenza pandemics. **By protecting yourself, you also protect others.**

It's important to take steps to reduce your chances of getting sick from avian influenza. **Follow these tips to keep yourself and others safe.**

You can be infected by:



- Handling sick birds or touching surfaces sick birds have been on, and then touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Breathing in the avian influenza virus in droplets or dust from close contact with sick birds

How to protect yourself?

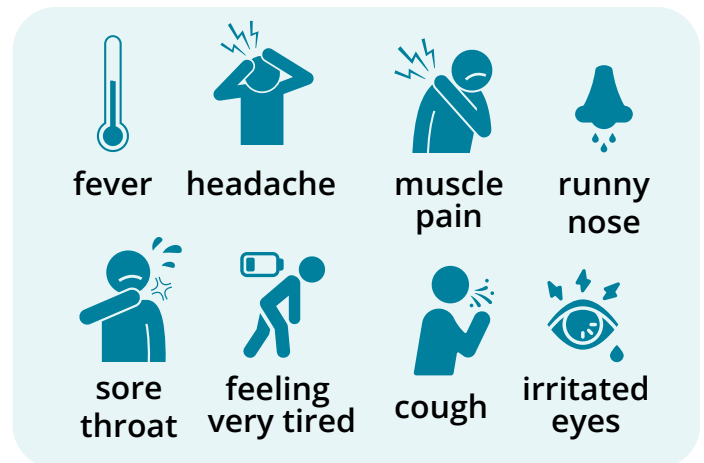
- **Limit direct contact** with sick or dead birds and their environments, and work in **well-ventilated spaces**, whenever possible
- Wear **personal protective equipment (PPE)**:
 - N95 respirator and rubber or disposable gloves
 - Eye protection (e.g., goggles, face shields, safety glasses)
 - Disposable gown or coveralls and disposable protective shoe/boot covers or rubber boots
- **Do not** eat, drink, chew gum, smoke, vape, or use the bathroom when wearing PPE
- **Wash your hands** regularly with soap and water and **clean, disinfect or dispose** any potentially contaminated clothing, equipment or surfaces
- **Get the free annual flu shot**
- Follow WorkSafeBC and AgSafe guidance



If you feel sick within 10 days after being exposed to the avian influenza virus

- **Stay home** and away from others while you have symptoms until 24 hours after your symptoms are gone. If you have to be near others, **wear a mask and wash your hands** often.
- **Tell your health care provider** that you have been in contact with animals and are concerned about avian influenza. This will help them give you appropriate advice on testing and treatment.

Symptoms include:



How local public health teams help?

- When a farm has avian influenza, local public health **checks who may have been exposed** and provides **guidance on testing and treatment** (including medicine to prevent illness)
- If you have been exposed, public health staff will ask for details about:
 - your exposure and what personal protective measures you used (like N95 masks, eye covering, hand washing, etc);
 - any pre-existing medical conditions;
 - any current flu-like symptoms and whether you had a recent flu shot

How farm owners and operators help?

- Post and share information with farm workers about protecting themselves against avian influenza
- Share contact information with public health about workers and visitors to the premises during the avian influenza event

More information:

BC Centre for Disease Control: bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/avian-influenza

WorkSafeBC: <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/injuries-diseases/infectious-diseases/types/avian-flu>

AgSafe BC: <https://agsafebc.ca/download-category/avian-influenza/>