

Avian influenza in BC

Precautions for workers who may encounter wild animals

January 2025

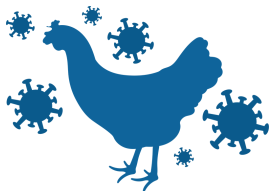


Avian influenza and human health

Avian influenza virus spreads easily from bird to bird. It can also infect a wide range of other wild and domestic animals such as skunks, foxes, cows, goats, dogs, 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. While the current strain of avian influenza (H5N1) does not easily transmit to humans, workers who come into contact with birds and wildlife, especially sick or dead animals, **may be at higher risk and should take precautions.**

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

Who to contact if you encounter a sick or dead animal?

Type of bird or animal	Who to contact
Domestic animals e.g. pets, poultry and other livestock	<u>Canadian Food Inspection Agency</u>
Wild birds e.g. seabirds, geese, ducks, eagles	BC Wild Bird Mortality Line: 1-866-431-2473
Wild mammals e.g. foxes, racoon, skunks, minks	During regular business hours: <u>BC Wildlife Health Program</u> (250-751-7246) After hours: your <u>nearest wildlife rehabilitator</u>
Marine mammals e.g. seal, dolphin, porpoise	<u>BC Marine Mammal Response Network</u> 1-800-465-4336

Precautions for handling a sick or dead animal

- In all situations, **complete a risk assessment** that considers:
 - the circumstances of the sick/dead animal,
 - the anticipated activities involving the animal, and
 - the environment where the activities will occur.
- The anticipated level of exposure will determine the precautions needed
- **Ventilation:** whenever possible work in a well-ventilated environment
 - If working outdoors, try to stay upwind to avoid inhaling dust, feathers and aerosols.
 - If working indoors or in a poorly ventilated environment: opening a door or window, and wearing a respirator can further reduce your exposure to dust, feathers and aerosols.
- **Protective equipment:**
 - Limit direct contact with a sick/dead animal and maintain distance (e.g., using a tool/shovel, enclosure/cage) whenever possible
 - If you are working with birds or mammals with signs of illness (e.g., respiratory signs such as difficulty breathing, secretions from the nose or mouth or neurologic signs such as seizures, tremors, circling, inability to walk), the following protective equipment is recommended:
 - N95 respirator (or other approved disposable particulate respirator)
 - Rubber or disposable gloves (e.g. nitrile)
 - Eye protection (e.g., goggles, face shields, safety glasses)
 - Disposable gown or coveralls
 - Disposable protective shoe/boot covers or rubber or polyurethane boots
 - Heavy gloves may be required in situations involving handling animals that can pierce skin with beaks, teeth, or claws.
- **Hand hygiene:**
 - Wear disposable gloves (e.g., nitrile gloves) when cleaning equipment, or handling blood, feces, respiratory secretions, or contaminated feed and water.
 - Wash hands with warm soapy water or use hand sanitizer immediately after removing and discarding gloves.
 - Dispose of gloves and all potentially contaminated material immediately in an appropriate manner (e.g., biohazard)



- **Cleaning, disinfection and disposal:**

- Use appropriate disinfectants to sanitize equipment (e.g., sampling tools, animal restraint, holding, and transportation devices, banding tools or bird bags) or any potentially contaminated surface.

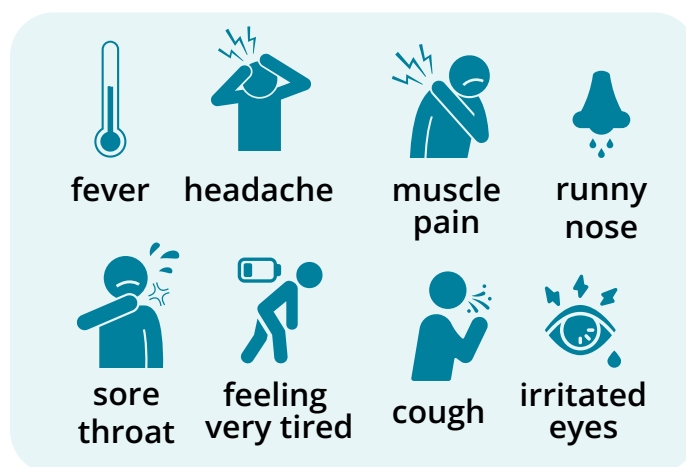
- **Avoid cross-contamination:**

- Do not eat, drink, chew gum, smoke, vape, or use the bathroom when wearing PPE
- Do not touch your eyes or face while handling wildlife or cleaning contaminated areas and equipment.
- Use separate clothing, equipment, and footwear for handling wild birds and other wildlife

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:



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>

Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/flu-influenza/fact-sheet-guidance-on-precautions-handling-wild-birds.html>