

Bird flu (avian influenza)

Information for poultry workers

OFFICIAL

Key messages

- Bird flu mainly affects birds.
- Humans can rarely get it from close contact with infected birds.
- Contact with birds, bird faeces (poo) or feathers can spread bird flu to humans.
- To prevent catching bird flu, avoid contact with birds and their poo.
- Always follow personal protective measures.
- If exposed to bird flu, monitor symptoms for 10 days after your last contact.

What is bird flu?

Bird flu, also known as avian influenza, is a disease of birds caused by different strains of the bird flu virus. It spreads between wild and domesticated birds but rarely from birds to humans. Sometimes people catch it when they have close contact with sick poultry or other birds.

There are different strains of bird flu, some that are more likely to cause death and disease in birds (high pathogenic) and some that are less likely to cause death and disease (low pathogenic).

Bird flu rarely spreads from human to human but may happen if someone is looking after a sick family member.

Previous bird flu outbreaks in Australia among commercial flocks of birds have been contained and eradicated.

What are the symptoms?

Bird flu rarely infects people, but when it does symptoms can be mild or severe.

Mild symptoms could include conjunctivitis (sore, red eyes), a runny nose and sore throat or gastrointestinal symptoms like diarrhoea, while other common symptoms include fever, cough, headache, aching muscles and respiratory symptoms.

Severe symptoms could include pneumonia and respiratory distress. Report these symptoms to your Local Public Health Unit.

Symptoms can appear from 1 to 10 days after exposure to the virus.

Who is at risk?

People who have close contact with sick birds, such as poultry workers, are at risk. This can happen when the virus gets into a person's eyes, nose or mouth, or is inhaled. For example, a person may handle a sick bird and forget to wash their hands before eating. The virus can also survive in raw poultry meat but is killed by cooking. You can't catch bird flu through eating fully cooked poultry or eggs.

How is it prevented?

People who work with infected birds must use personal protective equipment (PPE) and follow infection prevention control measures. Antiviral medication can also prevent illness.

- Wear PPE like disposable or non-disposable fluid-resistant overalls, face mask (N95 or P2), goggles or face shield, waterproof boots, head or hair covers, and gloves.
- Follow expert advice on PPE use, disposal, or disinfection after use.
- Wash hands before and after handling animals or contaminated surfaces (bird poo, respiratory secretions or saliva) or contaminated products like litter, and after touching or removing PPE.
- Get a seasonal influenza vaccine. It doesn't protect you from bird flu, but it can help prevent the mixing of the bird flu with seasonal influenza to create a new virus.
- Keep anyone who is sick from entering poultry houses or processing facilities.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

In people, bird flu is usually diagnosed by testing swabs from the nose and throat.

Antiviral medications used to treat human influenza can treat bird flu. Isolation and medical care may be necessary.

I have been exposed to an infected bird – what do I do?

Monitor for any symptoms for 10 days after your last exposure and contact your Local Public Health Unit if any symptoms develop.

A member of the Local Public Health Unit will check on you regularly and answer any questions.

Watch out for:

- fever (monitor temperature daily for a temperature of at least 38 °C)
- respiratory symptoms – for example, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing
- fatigue or collapse due to exhaustion
- chills or shakes
- headache
- muscle or joint aches
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- red, sore eyes (conjunctivitis)

If you have been in contact with contaminated birds or poultry products and have any symptoms:

- contact your Local Public Health Unit (see contact details below)
- see a doctor and tell them you may have been in contact with bird flu (it is a good idea to call ahead)
- isolate yourself until you've been medically assessed
- practise good hygiene by covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing
- wash hands after coughing, sneezing, or using tissues or handkerchiefs
- dispose of tissues.

Where to get help

- To contact your Local Public Health Unit, call 1300 651 160 (press 3, then enter your postcode) or see [Local Public Health Units | health.vic.gov.au](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/local-public-health-units) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/local-public-health-units>.
- In an emergency, always call Triple Zero (000)

- Your GP (doctor)
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 606 024 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- If you're having a difficult time or feeling overwhelmed, visit the [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/counselling-online-and-phone-support-for-mental-illness) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/counselling-online-and-phone-support-for-mental-illness>> to learn more about the mental health services available to you.
- For 24-hour crisis support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

To receive this document in another format, phone 1300 651 160, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email <infectious.diseases@health.vic.gov.au>.

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