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TO: Grant County Media

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Stay Safe from Avian Influenza

Protecting public health among current avian influenza concerns

Grant County Health District (GCHD) continues to closely monitor the recent U.S. activity of avian influenza, commonly known as bird flu, and its potential impact on human health. During 2024, outbreaks of avian influenza occurred in wild birds, domestic poultry, and livestock herds across the country. The majority of human infections have occurred after prolonged, close contact with infected animals. In January, CDC announced the first human death from avian influenza in the United States. **While the risk to humans is still considered low, there are steps you should take to keep you and your family safe.**

About Avian Influenza

Avian influenza is a disease caused by influenza viruses that naturally occur among wild aquatic birds. It can also infect other types of birds and many other animal species. In rare cases, avian influenza can infect people and make them sick.

How Avian Influenza is Spread to People

Infected animals spread the virus through their saliva, mucus and feces. It is also found in the raw milk of infected dairy cattle. People can get infected if the virus gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth or if it is breathed in.

There has been no recent evidence showing that avian influenza can spread from person to person. Avian flu is closely monitored by several human and animal health agencies because of its potential to mutate, a common trait among viruses. Mutations can sometimes make viruses spread easier and be more severe, as seen with COVID-19. Since bird flu can spread between animal species, mutations could also make it possible to spread from person to person.

Avian Influenza Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches
- Conjunctivitis
- In severe cases, difficulty breathing

What to Do if You're Sick After Contact with Birds or Livestock

If you have these symptoms after being around birds, livestock, other animals suspected of being infected with avian influenza, or their habitats you should:

- Contact your doctor right away
- Inform your doctor that you were in contact with high-risk animals
- Wear a face mask for all appointments

Avian Influenza in our Area

Grant County: Wild birds have been the only reports of avian influenza in Grant County. Over 100 wild birds from Grant County have tested positive since January 2022. No other animals or humans have been identified with avian influenza. For a list of avian influenza-positive wild birds from Grant County and beyond, visit:

[HPAI Detections in Wild Birds](#)

Washington: Avian influenza has been found in wild birds, domestic poultry, and other animals. Unlike many other states, Washington has not had detections in dairy cattle or other livestock. **For a complete list of all detections of avian influenza in animals in the United States, visit:** [2022–2024 Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza](#)

Human Cases in Washington: Last fall, a large poultry farm in Franklin County had an outbreak that affected thousands of chickens. As a result, 14 people were infected from exposure to sick poultry while working at the farm. These are the only identified human cases of avian influenza in our state. For a list of all the human cases of avian influenza in our country, visit: [H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation | Bird Flu | CDC](#)

High Risk Groups

Anyone who has close contact with a bird or other animal infected with avian influenza is at risk. Those at greatest risk are people who own or work closely with animals or their environments. This includes:

- [Backyard poultry owners](#)
- [Poultry, livestock, or wildlife workers](#)
- Veterinary staff
- [Hunters](#)

How to Protect Yourself

- **Avoid contact with animals that could be infected with avian influenza.** Do not handle sick or dead birds, livestock, or other animals.
 - **Practice good hygiene.** Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. This is especially important after handling birds, livestock, or their environments.
 - **Cook poultry, meat, and eggs thoroughly.** Ensure all [poultry, meat](#), and [eggs](#) are cooked to their required internal temperatures.
 - **Avoid raw milk.** Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or consume products made from it, as they can carry harmful germs, including influenza viruses.
 - **Protect pets.** Cats are especially vulnerable to avian influenza. Dogs can also be infected though it is much rarer.
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- Limit cats' time outdoors to prevent them from hunting wild birds or other animals.
- Do not let hunting dogs retrieve or have contact with sick birds or birds found deceased.
- Do not feed your animals raw milk or uncooked meat.
- Talk with your veterinarian if you have questions or concerns about avian influenza in a pet.
- **Protect backyard poultry and livestock.**
 - Keep wild birds and animals away from your animals.
 - Disinfect equipment often.
 - For additional guidance visit: [Avian Influenza | Washington State Department of Agriculture](#)
- **Consider getting the seasonal flu vaccine.** The flu shot will not protect you from avian flu but will help decrease the chance of the virus mutating. The flu shot can also help keep your immune system strong. Fighting one flu virus weakens your immune system, making you more vulnerable to other infections, including bird flu.

What to Do if You Encounter Sick or Dead Birds or Livestock

- Avoid direct contact with the animal. Use [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) if handling the animal is necessary.
- Report sick/dead **domestic animals** to the Washington State Department of Agriculture [online](#) or by calling 1-800-606-3056.
- Report sick/dead **wild birds or wildlife** to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife using their [online report form](#).

GCHD commits to informing the public of the risks of animal diseases that can affect people. Updates will be provided as new information becomes available. By taking these precautions, you can reduce the risk of avian influenza.

