



State of California Guidance on Bird Flu for Workers and Employers

Nov. 5, 2024

The California departments of Food & Agriculture, Public Health, Industrial Relations, Cal-OSHA as well as the Labor and Workforce Development Agency and Cal OES are working together to identify and eliminate bird flu in dairy herds, poultry, and domestic and wild animals. The state is also working to minimize any illness in humans by detecting, treating, and investigating possible cases, by implementing preventive measures, and by executing timely public education efforts. This document will be updated as new information becomes available.

What is bird flu and who is at risk?

Bird flu -- also known as avian influenza A (H5N1) or highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) -- is caused by a virus that can cause serious illness and death in birds and mammals.

Human infections with bird flu viruses are rare, and no person-to-person spread has been detected in California or the U.S. People who have contact with infected dairy cows, poultry, or wildlife have a greater chance of getting infected, which can happen if the virus gets into a person's eyes, nose, mouth, or when inhaled.

How serious is bird flu?

A small number of people in California have reported cases of bird flu following direct contact with an infected dairy cow. To date, all have reported mild symptoms (primarily eye infections), and none have been hospitalized. Because bird flu viruses can change and gain the ability to spread more easily between people, public health officials have provided preventive measures and are monitoring human infections carefully.

What are symptoms of bird flu?

In humans, bird flu symptoms include eye redness or discharge, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, diarrhea, vomiting, muscle or body aches,

headaches, fatigue, trouble breathing, and fever. If you have symptoms of bird flu, especially if you have had contact with infected animals, tell your employer and contact your occupational health or regular health care provider, and contact your [local public health department](#) for testing.

What can people do to keep from getting infected if they interact with dairy cows, poultry, or wildlife?

People who work with infected dairy cows or raw milk should use protective gear, or PPE, to reduce the risk of getting bird flu. See this flyer for information on public health recommendations to prevent infection: [Worker Protection from the Bird Flu - H5N1 PPE](#).

Where can people get this gear?

To access PPE, ask your employer or contact your local public health department.

What are employers required to do?

Where occupational exposure to infectious animals may occur, [employers must provide and ensure](#) employees have [PPE](#) that includes eye protection, respiratory protection, coveralls, aprons, gloves, head coverings and shoe covers.

If a worker thinks they may have bird flu, what should they do?

Workers who experience an illness or other condition they believe is work-related should report their symptoms to their supervisor.

If a worker thinks they have symptoms of bird flu, they should tell their supervisor that they may have been exposed and contact their [local public health department](#) to arrange for testing and any needed treatment. They should tell them they may have been exposed to bird flu and reduce contact with others until symptoms get better. Their local health department can give directions on how to reduce contact with others and potential exclusion from work until they are better.

Do workers who get bird flu on the job have the right to paid time off or job protection?

California workers, including agricultural employees, are entitled to [five days or 40 hours of paid sick leave](#) each year, with some exceptions¹. Retaliating or

discriminating against an employee who requests paid sick leave or uses paid sick leave, or both, is prohibited by law.

Employees who get bird flu on the job are also eligible for workers' compensation benefits. The employer is required to provide the affected employee with a workers' compensation claim form and send the worker to a workers' compensation health care provider knowledgeable about avian flu. Workers' compensation is designed to provide workers with the medical treatment they need to recover from work-related injury or illness, partially replace the wages they lose while they are recovering, and to help them return to work.

For work-related questions or complaints, contact the Cal/OSHA Call Center in English or Spanish at 1-833-579-0927.

How can farmers get help if they suspect their animals are infected with bird flu?

Farmers should contact the California Department of Food and Agriculture's bird flu hotline at 866-922-2473.

How can farmers get help strengthening their Illness and Injury Safety Program?

Employers can contact the California Occupational Health and Safety Division at 800-963-9424 for a free consultation.

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ⁱ Exceptions relate to flight deck and cabin crew members, retired annuitants working for government entities, employees working for railroads and construction workers covered by a collective bargaining unit.