



Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

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DEM CONFIRMS DOMESTIC BIRD CASE OF AVIAN FLU

PROVIDENCE, RI – The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) today is announcing the presence of the [H5N1 strain of avian influenza](#) in a noncommercial farm flock in southern Washington County. Earlier today, staff from DEM’s Division of Agriculture and Forest Environment’s [Animal Health Unit](#) humanely euthanized a flock of about 40 birds to minimize their suffering from the infection and prevent the spread of the disease to other birds. Rhode Island previously had an H5N1 infection in a noncommercial backyard flock [in 2022](#). The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) considers [the public health risk for H5N1 to be low](#). No person-to-person spread of H5N1 has been detected in the US. To date, Rhode Island has not had any human cases of H5N1.

RI is situated on the Atlantic flyway, a major north-south migratory bird route. H5N1 is expected to be present in wild birds in the area because of the virus’s prevalence in a wide variety of wild waterfowl and shorebird species that migrate in this flyway. The widespread prevalence of H5N1 in wild bird populations throughout the US [is well documented](#). Initially restricted to wild birds and poultry, H5N1 has spilled over into other mammals, including wildlife like foxes, bears, and seals; domestic animals, like cats and dogs; and farm animals like goats and [dairy cows](#).

“DEM’s proactive response plan to H5N1 bird detections includes responding quickly to reports of sick or dying domestic birds, obtaining samples, and submitting these samples to nationally accredited labs for a diagnosis,” said State Veterinarian Scott Marshall, DVM, who is leading the state’s H5N1 response. “The key to keeping domestic birds healthy is to have biosecurity practices in place, which involve restricting access to and keeping people away from your birds, keeping your birds separated from all wild birds, particularly migratory waterfowl, and keeping cages, coops, and clothes clean and disinfected.”

“While the public health risk of H5N1 remains low, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) has been coordinating closely with DEM for months on preparedness measures and has been communicating regularly with the healthcare professional community,” said Director of Health Jerry Larkin, MD. “Some basic prevention measures, such as avoiding contact with sick and dead animals, can help people stay healthy and safe.”

The food supply remains safe. The US has the strongest avian influenza surveillance program in the world. Public health officials continue to monitor for changes in the virus and do not allow infected poultry products to be introduced into the food chain. RI participates in a federal program for H5N1 surveillance of

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milk supplies and dairy herds. There have been no positive H5N1 samples in milk in RI. Pasteurization inactivates the virus in milk. People should avoid unpasteurized (raw) dairy products.

The best way to prevent avian influenza in humans is for people to avoid exposure. People who work with or have recreational exposure to birds, poultry, or cows are at a greater risk for infection. These individuals should consider [wearing personal protective equipment](#) during animal exposures. This means avoiding direct contact with birds or other animals infected with or suspected to be infected with avian influenza. Avian influenza viruses respond to standard antiviral drugs. For more detailed public health information related to H5N1, please visit RIDOH's webpage at: www.health.ri.gov/h5n1.

The positive detection was confirmed through laboratory testing at the [University of Connecticut lab](#) affiliated with the [National Veterinary Services Lab \(NVSL\)](#). Since emerging in the United States in 2022, the H5N1 strain has been detected in every state. It was first detected in Rhode Island in [a noncommercial backyard flock](#) in 2022, followed by a fox kit in 2023, which was RI's only confirmed mammalian case of H5N1. RI has not yet had a positive commercial bird case of H5N1.

Once an H5N1 diagnosis is confirmed, infected domestic birds will be depopulated within 24 hours. H5N1 infection requires a rapid response because domestic poultry mortality rates exceed 90 percent. Depopulating infected domestic birds, which DEM strives to do by using [a method of euthanasia approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association](#), limits how much they suffer from the infection and removes them as a source of infection for other birds. DEM is monitoring the situation following CDC and US Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidance. For detailed information on H5N1, DEM's response plan, and a list of frequently asked questions, please visit: www.dem.ri.gov/h5n1.

DEM continues to stress the need for basic but essential practices known as [biosecurity measures](#) in outreach to commercial and domestic bird owners across RI. These biosecurity measures include properly disposing of dead birds, not sharing equipment with other poultry producers or farmers, knowing the warning signs of infectious diseases, and reporting sick birds or unusual bird deaths to DEM. Members of the public should report sick or dying domestic birds to DEM's Division of Agriculture [through this form](#). The public should report observations of sick or dying wild birds to DEM's Division of Fish & Wildlife [through this form](#). As always, the public should not touch sick or dead birds and should keep dogs on leashes and away from carcasses.

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