

Public Health Advisory

To:	Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora Healthcare sector contacts
From:	Dr Emma Sherwood, Acting National Clinical Director Medical Officer of Health, NPHS
Date:	10/06/2024
Title:	Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI or Avian Flu) update

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Update

Please share the following information with relevant staff in your organisation

Overview

Following recent cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza/HPAI (also commonly known as avian flu or bird flu) in humans in the US and Australia, this information provides an update on the disease, the health preparedness measures underway, and guidance for clinicians.

The overall public health risk of avian influenza A (H5N1) to New Zealand is currently low. Since the virus cannot spread easily from human to human, the risk of importation of a human case into NZ is very low, and there has never been a case of HPAI in humans or animals reported in New Zealand.

The risk of infection is from prolonged, unprotected exposure to infected animals (e.g. poultry, wild birds, dairy cattle) in areas experiencing an HPAI outbreak.

Preparation for HPAI

Health NZ | Te Whatu Ora, the Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora and ESR are monitoring the international situation and working with the Ministry for Primary Industries and the Department of Conservation to prepare for any cases in animals or humans in New Zealand. This work includes updating guidance for public health services as well as developing health and safety guidance for the public and for specific occupational groups who might be at higher risk of exposure to the virus (for example people who work with poultry, dairy cattle or who are exposed to infected birds and marine mammals).

When should HPAI be suspected?

Consider HPAI in people with compatible symptoms **AND** the following epidemiological risk factors:

- recent overseas travel (within 10 days before symptom onset) to countries with ongoing HPAI outbreaks **AND**
- contact with sick or dead animals or birds (or droppings/faeces), or visited dairy/poultry farms or live bird markets overseas within 10 days before symptom onset.

Symptoms of HPAI

HPAI symptoms can range in severity, from conjunctivitis or very mild coryzal or flu-like symptoms, to severe illness including pneumonia, respiratory failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome, multi-organ failure, sepsis, meningoencephalitis, and death.

If you suspect a case of HPAI in the community (GP) or in a hospital

- Isolate the patient and follow airborne and contact infection control precautions.
- Document their travel history and history of exposure to sick animals, particularly birds (including visiting dairy or poultry farms and live bird markets).
- Notify the local Medical Officer of Health on suspicion of a case.
- In conjunction with public health, seek infectious disease and microbiology advice regarding assessment, testing and treatment.

-
- Ensure diagnostic samples (e.g. nasopharyngeal swabs or aspirates) are taken for influenza PCR, noting HPAI risk factors on the laboratory form.
 - Laboratories which identify influenza A positive samples from patients with suspected HPAI should arrange further sub-typing.
 - Local public health teams should immediately notify the national protection clinical team on call and follow CD manual guidance (once published) or interim guidance from the Protection Clinical team.

Further Information

Further information about avian flu is available here:

[Public Health Information - HPAI](#)

[Ministry for Primary Industries - HPAI](#)

[Department of Conservation - HPAI](#)

Contacts

Email: protection.clinical@tewhatuora.govt.nz

Phone: 021 225 4858 (incl. After hours)