

H5 bird flu information for farmers



Good on-farm biosecurity will help to protect livestock from the risk of H5 bird flu.

About H5 bird flu

H5 bird flu (H5N1 avian influenza clade 2.3.4.4b) is a highly contagious viral disease that mainly affects birds. It causes severe clinical signs and high mortality rates in birds.

The virus can also spread to some mammals, including cattle.

H5 bird flu in dairy cattle

Since 2024, H5 bird flu has been detected in dairy cattle in the United States, likely following introduction from infected wild birds. Cases remain rare.

The risk of transmission from cattle to humans is low. A small number of overseas dairy farm workers who were in close contact with infected cattle and not wearing appropriate PPE were also infected with the virus. These workers showed mild symptoms and recovered.

To date, H5 bird flu has not been detected or reported in beef cattle.

American Veterinary Medical Association advises that most cattle recover in 2 to 3 weeks with supportive care. Farmers can reduce the risk of infection and spread by implementing strong biosecurity measures and limiting cattle exposure to wild birds and contaminated environments.



Good biosecurity practice

You can be prepared by using good biosecurity practices, monitoring the health of your herds, and seeking veterinary advice if your animals become unwell.

There are resources on our website to help you improve biosecurity on your farm: www.mpi.govt.nz/hpai

Cattle with mild illness show non-specific clinical signs such as reduced milk production, thicker colostrum-like milk, reduced appetite, lethargy, fever and dehydration.

As always, seek professional advice from your veterinarian for any aspects of herd health or management. H5 bird flu can only be diagnosed through laboratory testing.

How to protect your herd

MPI assesses the risk of transmission from birds to cattle or other livestock in New Zealand as very low. One reason for this is that our farming practices are different from the United States. However, we recommend remaining alert, maintaining good biosecurity practices and monitoring the health of your herds.

Recommendations for good biosecurity practices include:

- Keep NAIT (National Animal Identification and Tracing) updated. NAIT is a legal requirement and key to good biosecurity, as it makes it easier and faster to trace animals.
- Keep cattle in separate groups and avoid mixing them. Minimise the number of new animals introduced and keep them low risk. For example, keep mobs separate on grazing blocks.
- Secure boundaries through fencing and due diligence. Make sure nose-to-nose contact is not possible between cattle held on neighbouring properties.
- Ensure any biological products and equipment you bring on-farm (such as borrowed milk feeding equipment) is clean and disinfected prior to use on your property.
- Avoid having staff work across multiple sites unless good decontamination steps are in place for farm gear and equipment.
- Minimise contact with wild birds and their faeces by fencing off water ways, ponds, and duck nesting areas so cattle or other livestock don't have access to them.



- Protect feed from potential contamination by wild birds, rodents, and other pests.
- Reduce the risk of introduction of any virus or bacteria into the mammary tissue of dairy cattle by maintaining good hygiene practices during milking.

H5 bird flu in wild and domestic birds

The most obvious sign of H5 bird flu is sudden death in several birds. Other signs can include weakness, tremors, paralysis, difficulty breathing, lack of co-ordination, blindness, trembling and diarrhoea.

Poultry show more severe signs than wild birds. These include lethargy, reduced appetite, droopy head, darkened and/or swollen comb/wattle, panting and nasal secretions, unusual drop in egg production and bleeding disorders.

If you notice poultry or domestic birds exhibiting signs of H5 bird flu, contact your veterinarian first to rule out more common avian diseases. Wait for your veterinarian's instructions before handling any sick or dead birds.



Photo: DOC, photographer Rod Morris



Reporting suspected H5 bird flu

If you notice poultry or domestic birds exhibiting signs of H5 bird flu, contact your veterinarian first to rule out more common avian diseases. Wait for your veterinarian's instructions before handling any sick or dead birds.

If you see three or more sick or dead wild birds in a group, report it immediately to the exotic pest and disease hotline on **0800 80 99 66**. Do not handle or move the birds.

Provide as much detail as you can, including:

- common name or species of sick or dead bird, if known
- how many are sick or freshly dead, and the total number present
- a GPS reading or other precise location information
- photographs and videos of sick and dead birds.

We will take the details and one of our specialist biosecurity investigators will assess the information and contact you.

DairyNZ

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For more information visit
www.mpi.govt.nz/bird-flu

