



# Ohio Department of Natural Resources

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## **Kendra S. Wecker, Chief**

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March 25, 2022

Re: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Circulating in Wild Birds

Dear Ohio Wildlife Rehabilitators:

An outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is currently affecting wild and domestic birds in North America. Below please find information about this disease and the current outbreak, interim guidance on how to respond to suspect positive birds, and who to contact should you receive reports of morbidity or mortality events from the public.

### **What We Know: EA H5 (2.3.4.4) Lineage**

Avian influenza viruses are characterized using two proteins: hemagglutinin (H1-16) and neuraminidase (N1-9). The combination of these proteins is what we call a subtype (e.g. H1N1). Strains commonly circulate in aquatic bird species, notably waterfowl, which can serve as disease reservoirs showing few to no signs of infection. These viruses are further divided into low pathogenic and highly pathogenic strains based on how they affect chickens. Subtypes involving H5 and H7 are at an elevated risk of becoming highly pathogenic.

In December 2021, a Eurasian-origin strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza, H5N1 (2.3.4.4) was detected in a multi-species exhibition flock in Canada. By January, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced its first detection in a hunter-harvested American wigeon from South Carolina. Indiana reported the first detection in a commercial poultry operation (turkeys) in February, and detections continue to roll in across the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways from commercial flocks, backyard flocks, and surveillance of wild birds.

On March 17, 2022, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources-Division of Wildlife, announced the first detections in wild birds in both Ottawa and Erie County, Ohio. We should assume that EA H5N1 (2.3.4.4) is already circulating in wild birds across the state.

## **What You Can Do: Limit Intakes, Promote Biosafety, and Report Mortalities**

During this active HPAI outbreak, we all need to operate under a different paradigm. Treat your current patients as your flock and prioritize their health and safety over that of new intakes.

**Admitting species that may carry HPAI (e.g. ducks, geese) or those showing clinical signs consistent with HPAI (e.g. seizures, ataxia) can place your whole facility at risk. HPAI is extremely transmissible in the air and through contaminated clothing, equipment, or other fomites. Humane euthanasia of clinical suspects or potential reservoir species may save more lives.**

### Considerations for Working with HPAI Suspects:

- HPAI has zoonotic potential, meaning there are risks to human health by caring for clinical suspects or reservoir species. The strain currently circulating in wild birds in the U.S. seems less capable of infecting people or causing illness, distinguishing it from other highly pathogenic H5N1 strains. That being said, minimizing exposure to volunteers and personnel is paramount.
- Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including: dedicated footwear, change of clothes or Tyvek, disposable gloves (change between patients/sites of origin), safety glasses or goggles (can substitute prescription lenses), and a mask (surgical mask at minimum, fit-tested N95 respirator is ideal).
- Quarantine new intakes for a minimum of 10 days in a separate building or room with its own air exchange, when possible; transfer in-patients that suddenly deteriorate to reduce risk of further exposure. Susceptible individuals typically decline within 3-5 days of exposure to the virus.
  - Assign dedicated staff to care for these animals, or care for these animals last.
  - If education/ambassador animals also reside at your facility, transfer away from hospital area and assign dedicated staff to care for these animals only.
  - Contact your local veterinarian to arrange for testing prior to release from medical quarantine. Notify the Division of Wildlife at [wildlife.permits@dnr.ohio.gov](mailto:wildlife.permits@dnr.ohio.gov) of any suspected cases.  
**Please note: birds testing positive will require humane euthanasia and quarantine of your facility to prevent spread. This may also trigger a foreign animal disease (FAD) investigation by USDA.**
- If you receive birds that die during transport or once at your facility, double bag carcasses and decontaminate the exterior bag using Clorox® or Rescue™ wipes. Coordinate with your District Wildlife Office about whether or not the birds should be tested.
- Enhance your cleaning and disinfection protocols. Spraying surfaces can aerosolize infectious material, so wipe surfaces free of organic debris instead. Remember, adequate disinfectants like 10% bleach or 1% Virkon™ S require sufficient contact time (10 minutes) to kill virus. Let air dry or rinse with water prior to use. A variety of disinfectant wipes can also work more rapidly.
- Clinical signs can vary widely by species and circumstance, if present at all. They are also nonspecific. Make sure to consider other causes of neurologic deficit like acute trauma or lead ingestion, while taking the precautions listed above.

#### Considerations for Current In-Patients or Education Birds:

- Transition away from feeding wild birds or receiving carcass donations from hunters.
- House waterfowl in separate area when possible and ensure there is no contact across enclosures with gamebirds, raptors, and other sensitive species. Keep wild birds away from any domestic birds or poultry.
- Limit use of live birds in education programs, especially those requiring off-site travel to areas with heavy waterfowl use.

#### Additional Considerations for Volunteers and Staff:

- Minimize the number of people responding to sick bird calls in the field and ensure use of appropriate PPE and cleaning/disinfection of transport carriers and vehicles. Discourage direct handling by the public.
- Be cognizant that personnel may have pet birds or backyard poultry at home. Working in a rehab setting may place their own birds at risk as well as their patients. At a minimum, personnel should change clothes between settings even when working around healthy birds.
- If you receive reports of any number of sick/dead bald eagles, multiple (6 or more) sick or dead birds, particularly involving waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, cranes, pelicans, or avian scavengers (crows or gulls), please contact your District Wildlife Office regarding further investigation.

#### Additional Resources:

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**
  - Avian Influenza Current Situation Summary:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm>
  - Information for People Exposed to Birds Infected with Avian Influenza Viruses:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h5/infected-birds-exposure.htm>
  - Recommendations for Worker Protection and Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to Reduce Exposure to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A H5 Viruses:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h5/worker-protection-ppe.htm>
- **USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service:**
  - 2022 Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Wild Birds:  
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-2022/2022-hpai-wild-birds>
  - 2022 Confirmations of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Commercial and Backyard Flocks: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-2022/2022-hpai-commercial-backyard-flocks>

We are monitoring this outbreak and will update guidance as the situation evolves. If you have questions or concerns, please contact [Wildlife.Permits@dnr.ohio.gov](mailto:Wildlife.Permits@dnr.ohio.gov). Please report possible cases in domestic birds or poultry directly to Ohio Department of Agriculture, (614) 728-6220 or afterhours at (888) 456-3405. Keep affected carcasses on site until instructed on testing and disposal.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kendra S. Wecker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

KENDRA S. WECKER  
Chief