

FAQs

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What is H5 Bird Flu?

H5 Bird Flu is the commonly used name for a specific strain of bird flu virus.

Bird flu is also known as “[avian influenza](#)” or “AI”. The different strains of bird flu viruses are classified as either low pathogenicity (LPAI) or high pathogenicity (HPAI). Which group a bird flu virus belongs to depends on how seriously it affects poultry. HPAI bird flu viruses can **cause serious illness and death in poultry**, and sometimes also in wild birds.

H5 Bird Flu is a HPAI virus that has **been spreading globally since 2021**. Its full name is ‘HPAI H5N1 2.3.4.4b’ or ‘H5 HPAI’. **H5 Bird Flu has not been detected in Australia.**

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How does H5 Bird Flu differ from other bird flu viruses?

H5 Bird Flu differs from other bird flu viruses because of its recent geographic spread and the **frequency and severity of its impacts**. It originated in Asia, but since 2021 it has spread across Europe to North and South America and, recently, Antarctica.

The speed and extent of the **global spread of H5 Bird Flu is very unusual** for a bird flu virus.

H5 Bird Flu has been associated with an increased number, frequency and severity of bird flu outbreaks in both poultry and wild birds.

Millions of wild animals have now died worldwide due to H5 Bird Flu. Over 500 different wild bird and over 80 wild mammal species have been affected.

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Can humans contract H5 Bird Flu?

Bird flu viruses, including H5 Bird Flu, have the potential to infect humans.

Human infections with bird flu are rare, usually mild (although severe disease and even death may occur), and generally associated with close contact with infected animals or their environments.

It is recommended to avoid contact with sick or dead wildlife and their immediate environment (e.g., land or waterways in which sick or dead wildlife have been observed).

For more information on how to stay safe, see the [Australian Department of Health and Aged Care, Advice for people in contact with wild birds \(e.g., hunters and wildlife carers\)](#), [CDNA national guidelines for avian influenza – protecting people who work with birds and wildlife](#), and the [Bird flu toolkit for people who work with birds](#).

H5 Bird Flu is not a food safety concern, and it is safe to eat properly handled and cooked chicken meat, eggs and egg products. Visit the [Food Standards Australia New Zealand website](#) for more information.

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How might H5 Bird Flu arrive in Australia?

The annual Spring (August – November) **migration of wild shorebirds from the northern hemisphere to Australia** is the most likely way for H5 Bird Flu to arrive here. Most of these wild birds first arrive in northern parts of the country, however some fly directly to other locations around Australia.

It is also possible that H5 Bird Flu could arrive here through waterfowl entering from regions just to the north of Australia, or migratory seabirds travelling to Australia from the south. These wild bird movements can occur at any time of the year.

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How can I tell if a wild animal has H5 Bird Flu?

The signs of H5 Bird Flu infection in wildlife can vary widely. For example, animals may appear weak or unresponsive, display signs such as seizures, incoordination or breathing difficulties, or die suddenly without showing any signs of ill health.

More information on the **possible signs of H5 Bird Flu** infection in wildlife is available on our [website](#).

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What might an H5 Bird Flu outbreak in wildlife look like?

Outbreaks of H5 Bird Flu in wildlife overseas have most often been marked by the **sudden occurrence and rapid increase in numbers of sick and dead wildlife**.

Very large numbers of wild animals and a wide range of different species may be affected. The species most affected overseas have varied widely from region to region: for example, terns were heavily impacted in Scotland, birds of prey in the USA, pelicans in Peru, penguins in South Africa and seals and sealions in Argentina.

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What could happen to Australian wildlife if H5 Bird Flu arrives?

Based on the effects of H5 Bird Flu elsewhere around the world, outbreaks in Australian wildlife are likely to result in **sickness and subsequent deaths in a range of wild birds and some mammals**.

There is **uncertainty about how H5 Bird Flu will affect Australia's unique animals**, but we can make some predictions based on patterns observed elsewhere. Overseas, frequently affected wild birds include waterfowl (e.g., ducks, swans and geese), shorebirds (e.g., wading birds), seabirds (e.g., gulls and terns) and predatory or scavenging birds (e.g., eagles and other birds of prey). Although we assume that H5 Bird Flu could infect any wild bird, Australian species in these categories are likely to be more at risk.

Based on wild mammal cases overseas, **infections are most likely to occur in predatory or scavenging wild mammals, and marine mammals that have close contact with seabirds** (e.g., seals and sealions). Marsupials that are predators or scavengers (e.g. Tasmanian devil, quolls) are expected to be more at risk than plant-eating marsupials like kangaroos. No bat cases have been reported overseas and only a few species of rodent have reportedly been affected worldwide.

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What should I do if I suspect H5 Bird Flu in a wild animal?

Unfortunately, wildlife that become infected and develop signs of illness from H5 Bird Flu generally die within a few days of becoming sick. **There is no treatment for H5 Bird Flu in wildlife.**

If you suspect a wild animal may be infected with H5 Bird Flu:

- **AVOID** – keep yourself and others safe. Do not make direct or indirect contact with sick or dead wildlife or their immediate environment. Observe from a distance and keep pets away.
- **RECORD** – make a note of what you observe, including: number of animals affected, species/type of animal, location, date and time. Take photos or videos if safe to do so.
- **REPORT** – if you see unusual signs of sickness or death in wildlife, please call the [Emergency Animal Disease Hotline](#) on [1800 675 888](#)

Avian influenza is a [notifiable disease](#) which means if you suspect an animal may be affected, you must report it. Reporting will alert authorities so they can evaluate the need for investigation.

More [avian influenza](#) resources are available from Wildlife Health Australia, including advice for the general public on '[What to do if you encounter sick or dead wildlife](#)'.

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What is being done to monitor for H5 Bird Flu in Australian wild birds?

There are several ways that Australia is monitoring for the arrival of H5 Bird Flu in wildlife. As part of the [National Avian Influenza Wild Bird](#) surveillance program, government and university **researchers from all over Australia routinely sample healthy wild bird populations** to look for bird flu viruses. As of December 2024, over 154,900 samples have been tested through this program.

Due to the increased risks posed by H5 Bird Flu, this **surveillance has been expanded** in the last 3 years to include more species and more sampling locations.

Wildlife Health Australia also **maintains a network of surveillance partners** in zoos, veterinary clinics, universities and other agencies who contribute data on sick and dead wildlife to the national wildlife health database. Through these partners, **events involving sick and dead birds are regularly investigated** by state and territory animal health authorities to rule out H5 Bird Flu as a cause of illness.

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For all of our information and resources on H5 Bird Flu, visit our [Incident Information](#) page.

How is Australia preparing to protect wildlife from the impacts of H5 Bird Flu?

Commonwealth, State and Territory government agencies, wildlife managers, industry partners, Traditional Owners, ecologists, researchers, wildlife care providers, and organisations like Wildlife Health Australia are **working collaboratively to prepare and plan for the possible arrival of H5 Bird Flu**.

The Australian Government is investing in enhancing national preparedness and response capability – you can find further information and read more about the government response [here](#).

These webinars provide more information on current planning for the wildlife sector:

- Biodiversity Council webinar, '[Preparing for impacts of bird flu on Australian wildlife](#)'
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry '[Strengthening Australia's preparedness for high pathogenicity avian influenza](#)'
- Wildlife Health Australia, '[H5 Bird Flu in Wildlife](#)'

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I work with wildlife, what do I need to know?

Steps you can take to help protect Australian wildlife include **being aware of the [signs of H5 Bird Flu](#)** and reporting any unusual signs of sickness or death in wild animals to the [Emergency Animal Disease Hotline](#) on [1800 675 888](#). **If in doubt, report.**

Wildlife Health Australia has developed **Risk Mitigation Toolboxes** to assist [wildlife managers](#) and [wildlife care providers](#) with their preparations for the possible arrival of H5 Bird Flu in Australia.

Other useful resources for people who work with wildlife are available on the Wildlife Health Australia website, including **advice for [veterinarians and other animal health professionals](#)** and **[bird banders, wildlife rangers and researchers](#)**.

For further information or if you have specific queries, please contact the [animal health agency](#) in your jurisdiction.

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