

H5 Avian Influenza (H5 Bird Flu) and Wildlife

Advice for people who encounter sick or dead wildlife

Version 4.0, January 2026

People who encounter sick or dead wildlife should be aware of H5 bird flu to ensure appropriate reporting and investigation, and to minimise risks to themselves, other people, and animals. If you encounter sick or dead wildlife, you should:

- **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** multiple sick or dead wild animals via the [Emergency Animal Disease Hotline 1800 675 888](tel:1800675888). Reporting will alert authorities to the event so they can evaluate the need for diagnostic testing or other investigation. Even if testing is not undertaken, all reports help inform our understanding of the disease and how to manage it.

What is H5 Bird Flu?

Bird flu is also known as “[avian influenza](#)” (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 also known as *high pathogenicity avian influenza H5N1*. It includes the serious and highly contagious H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b strain which has been spreading globally since 2021 through the movement of wild birds, with unprecedented impact. **H5 bird flu has not been detected in Australia.**

H5 bird flu has caused significant illness and deaths in poultry, wild birds and mammals in all geographical regions except Oceania (which includes Australia and New Zealand). Overseas it has infected more than 560 bird species and more than 100 mammalian species, including wild marine and land mammals. The current global situation means an increased level of risk to Australia via the movements of infected wild birds from the northern hemisphere, from regions just to the north of Australia, or from Antarctic/Sub-Antarctic regions¹. Birds and mammals can catch H5 bird flu by close contact with infected birds, by eating or scavenging infected carcasses, or by indirect exposure to contaminated environments or objects (e.g. clothing, boots, equipment, etc.).

For further details about H5 bird flu in wildlife see the [WHA H5 bird flu FAQs](#).

¹ Wildlife Health Australia (2025) Technical Update - Global High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza in Wildlife Available from: https://wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/Portals/0/Incidents/HPAI_Technical_Update.pdf

Which species are affected?

- **Birds:**
 - **Wild birds:** all wild bird species should be considered potentially susceptible to H5 bird flu. Overseas, wild birds commonly affected by H5 bird flu include waterfowl, shorebirds, seabirds and predatory or scavenging species (e.g. eagles).
 - **Domestic poultry and captive birds:** poultry (e.g. chickens, turkeys) are particularly susceptible to H5 bird flu, but it should be assumed that all domestic bird species are susceptible.
- **Mammals:**
 - **Wild mammals:** wild mammal species that predate or scavenge on birds (e.g. foxes), and marine mammals that have close contact with seabirds (e.g. seals and sealions), are most susceptible to H5 bird flu.
 - **Domestic mammals:** a range of domestic mammals (including livestock and pets) have been reported with H5 bird flu, including domestic cats, dogs and cattle.

What to look out for and how to report

Infected **live birds or mammals** may show a wide range of signs, including:

- lack of coordination, tremors, seizures, swimming in circles
- twisted necks or other unusual posture
- inability to stand or fly
- diarrhoea
- difficulty breathing, coughing or sneezing
- swelling around the head, neck and eyes
- cloudiness or change in colour of the eyes
- sudden death, including the potential for mass mortality events.

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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.

REPORT multiple sick or dead wild animals via the [**Emergency Animal Disease \(EAD\) Hotline**](#) on 1800 675 888².

Reporting will alert authorities to the event so they can evaluate the need for diagnostic testing or other investigation. Even if testing is not undertaken, all reports help inform our understanding of the disease and how to manage it.

² The **Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) Hotline** is a toll-free number that connects callers to the relevant state or territory officer. Anyone suspecting an EAD outbreak should use this number to get immediate advice and assistance.

Can humans catch 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, and are 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 interim [Australian Centre for Disease Control \(CDC\) website](#).
- Information for bird owners, including protecting yourself and your birds, is available at [Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry](#).
- It is safe to eat properly cooked eggs, meat and poultry products.

More information and resources

The WHA website [H5 Bird Flu resource centre](#) includes information and links to resources for:

- Animal health professionals and wildlife care providers
- Wildlife managers
- Communication about H5 bird flu
- H5 bird flu human health considerations



Find out more at wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au

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