

H5 Bird Flu FAQs

Version 4.0, July 2026

- What is H5 bird flu?.....	2
- How does H5 bird flu differ from other bird flu viruses?	2
- How do animals get H5 bird flu and how can I help prevent spread?	3
- Can humans contract H5 bird flu?	3
- How can H5 bird flu get to Australia?	4
- How can I tell if a wild animal has H5 bird flu?	4
- What can H5 bird flu outbreaks in wildlife look like?	4
- What are the risks of H5 bird flu to Australian wildlife?	5
- How does Australia respond to H5 bird flu in wildlife?.....	5
- Can we vaccinate wildlife against H5 bird flu?	6
- Can wildlife be treated once they are infected?.....	6
- What have we learnt from H5 bird flu overseas?	6
- What should I do if I suspect H5 bird flu in a wild animal?	7
- What happens after I report?	7
- What is being done to monitor for H5 bird flu in Australian wild birds?.....	8
- How has Australia been preparing to protect wildlife from the impacts of H5 bird flu?.....	8
- I work with wildlife, what do I need to know?.....	9
- I have pets, how do I keep them safe from H5 bird flu?	9

What is H5 bird flu?

Bird flu is also known as “[avian influenza](#)” (AI).

Strains of bird flu viruses are classified as either low pathogenicity or high pathogenicity (which is referred to as HPAI, for high pathogenicity avian influenza).

- High pathogenicity bird flu viruses typically cause serious illness and death in poultry, but rarely in wild birds (until the emergence of this H5 bird flu strain – see [How does H5 bird flu differ from other bird flu viruses?](#)).
- Globally, including in Australia, low pathogenicity bird flu viruses occur naturally in wild birds, notably waterfowl (ducks, geese and swans) and shorebirds. They typically cause little or no disease in either wild birds or poultry.

H5 bird flu is a high pathogenicity virus, also known as H5N1 HPAI. It includes the serious and highly contagious H5N1 HPAI clade 2.3.4.4b strain, which has been spreading globally since 2021 through the movements of wild birds, with unprecedented impact.

Australia had its first detections of H5 bird flu in June 2026, in a migratory seabird on Western Australia’s southern coast. For more information on this event, see [birdflu.gov.au](#) and Wildlife Health Australia’s [Incident Information](#) page.

[Back to top](#)

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

H5 bird flu differs significantly from other high pathogenicity bird flu viruses such as H7 HPAI, which has previously caused outbreaks in poultry in Australia. All H7 HPAI outbreaks in Australia have been successfully eradicated.

Key differences of **H5 bird flu** compared with other high pathogenicity bird flu viruses include:

- the unprecedented **speed and scale of H5 bird flu’s global spread**
- its ability to **establish in wild bird populations** and the **wide range of wild bird and mammal species it has infected**
- the **frequency and severity of outbreaks** in both wild birds and poultry.

H5 bird flu originated in Asia and, since 2021, has spread across Europe to North and South America, Antarctica, sub-Antarctic islands and, most recently, detected on mainland Australia.

Overseas, it has affected a very wide range of species, including both domesticated and wild birds and mammals. To date, **millions of wild animals have died worldwide due to H5 bird flu**, and over 600 bird species and more than 100 mammalian species, have been affected.

Detections of H5 bird flu in Australia in June 2026 have involved individual migratory seabirds coming to mainland shores, and there is currently no evidence of large-scale deaths of animals in Australia.

[Back to top](#)

How do animals get H5 bird flu and how can I help prevent spread?

Birds and mammals infected with H5 bird flu shed the virus in their body fluids, droppings and feathers. The virus can also persist for months in environments contaminated by infected animals or their carcasses, under suitable conditions.

Birds and mammals can get H5 bird flu by close contact with infected animals (alive or dead) and through exposure to contaminated environments. They may also become infected by scavenging or preying on infected animals. When animals gather in large numbers, this increases opportunities for contact with infected animals and contaminated environments.

H5 bird flu can also contaminate objects such as clothing, boots, equipment and vehicles. If these items move to a new place before they are cleaned, they can carry the virus with them and spread it to other animals.

This is why it is important to follow advice from government agencies and when visiting national parks, nature reserves or agricultural areas keep shoes and clothes clean. This reduces the risk of disease spreading between places.

Additionally, human activities that encourage wildlife to congregate together may increase the risk of disease spread. For example, animals can be infected through close contact with each other, or with virus in the environment such as via droppings in and around bird baths or feeders. For more information, see [WHA Fact sheet Biosecurity concerns associated with feeding wild birds](#).

[Back to top](#)

Can humans contract H5 bird flu?

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

Human infections with H5 bird flu are rare, usually mild, and are generally associated with close contact with infected animals or their environments.

To stay safe, avoid contact with sick or dead wildlife and their immediate environment (for example, land or waterways in which sick or dead wildlife have been observed).

For further information, see:

- The Australian Centre for Disease Control [Bird flu webpage](#)
- Wildlife Health Australia's [H5 bird flu](#) resource centre, which includes specific advice for [veterinarians and other animal health professionals](#), and [people working with wildlife in the field](#), and other useful resources on H5 bird flu and human health.

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

[Back to top](#)

How can H5 bird flu get to Australia?

H5 bird flu is now found in wildlife almost globally and can be spread over large distances by the movements of wild birds from overseas. **These wild bird movements cannot be prevented.**

Wild bird movements that may result in H5 bird flu entry into Australia include three pathways 1) the annual Spring migration (August – November) of wild shorebirds and seabirds from the northern hemisphere to Australia, 2) non-seasonal movements such as waterfowl entering from regions to the north, and 3) seabirds travelling from Antarctic/subantarctic regions, which occurs at various times throughout the year.

Detections of H5 bird flu in Australia in June 2026 have been limited to a small number of individual wild seabirds. Analysis of virus from these birds has shown it is related to virus detected in seabirds travelling from the subantarctic regions.

There is currently no evidence of large-scale wildlife mortality in Australia.

For more information see birdflu.gov.au and Wildlife Health Australia's [Incident Information](#) page.

[Back to top](#)

How can I tell if a wild animal has H5 bird flu?

The signs of H5 bird flu infection in wild birds and mammals can vary widely. For example, they may appear weak or unresponsive, display signs such as seizures, incoordination or breathing difficulties, or die suddenly without showing any signs of ill health.

Overseas, frequently affected wild birds include waterfowl (for example, ducks, swans and geese), shorebirds (for example, wading birds), seabirds (for example, gulls and terns) and predatory or scavenging birds (for example, eagles and other birds of prey) but other types of bird can also be affected.

Among wild mammals, disease is most commonly seen in predatory or scavenging mammals (e.g. foxes, cats), and marine mammals that interact with seabirds, such as seals and sealions.

More information on the **possible signs of H5 bird flu** in wildlife are available in the Wildlife Health Australia [H5 bird flu](#) resource centre, including advice for [people who encounter sick and dead wildlife](#).

[Back to top](#)

What can H5 bird flu outbreaks in wildlife look like?

Outbreaks of H5 bird flu in wildlife are most often 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, seals and sealions in Argentina, and seabirds and seals in the Antarctic.

[Back to top](#)

What are the risks of H5 bird flu to Australian wildlife?

Uncertainty remains about how H5 bird flu will affect Australia's unique animals, but we can make some predictions based on patterns observed elsewhere – and the impacts could be devastating for local wildlife.

Based on the effects of H5 bird flu around the world, outbreaks in Australian wildlife are likely to result in **sickness and deaths in a range of wild birds and mammals**.

Overseas, frequently affected wild birds include **waterfowl (for example, ducks, swans and geese), shorebirds (for example, wading birds), seabirds (for example, gulls and terns) and predatory or scavenging birds (for example, 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** (for example, seals and sealions). Marsupials that are predators or scavengers (for example, Tasmanian devils and quolls) are expected to be more at risk than plant-eating marsupials like kangaroos, or invertebrate feeders like platypus and echidnas. No cases of illness in bats have been reported overseas and only a few species of rodent have reportedly been affected worldwide.

H5 bird flu is an "Influenza A" virus. Influenza A viruses do not cause disease in reptiles, amphibians, fish or invertebrates.

[Back to top](#)

How does Australia respond to H5 bird flu in wildlife?

Following the detections of H5 bird flu starting in June 2026, government agencies in Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland have responded swiftly (see birdflu.gov.au for further information).

The approach to bird flu outbreaks in Australia are described in the [AUSVETPLAN Disease Strategy: Avian Influenza](#) and the [National Management Agreement – H5 HPAI in wildlife](#) with broad decisions on response and recovery activities being made at a national level.

Response activities following detections of H5 bird flu in wildlife will depend on the specifics of the outbreak but may include: enhanced **biosecurity and hygiene measures**; enhanced **disease surveillance**; **carcass management**; **emergency conservation measures** and **restriction on visitors and activities** at certain sites or wildlife populations.

Culling, containing or dispersing wild animals and the destruction, broadscale disinfection or modification of habitat are ineffective measures for bird flu control and are not considered as appropriate measures under Australia's response policies.

For more information on emergency animal disease preparedness and response for H5 bird flu, see the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry [Guidance for response plans in the event of an outbreak of H5 High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza in wildlife](#).

[Back to top](#)

Can we vaccinate wildlife against H5 bird flu?

Vaccination of rare, protected and valuable native birds could be considered under the [Use of avian influenza vaccines for the protection of rare, protected and valuable avian species policy](#). However, the broadscale vaccination of birds in the wild is not considered appropriate, feasible or practicable.

The Australian Government has procured an inactivated H5 bird flu vaccine and has undertaken H5 bird flu vaccination trials and [pilot studies](#) to assess vaccine safety and efficacy in a range of non-poultry bird species.

There are currently no commercially available H5 bird flu vaccines authorised for use in native mammal species in Australia. Vaccination of priority mammal species, where practical and feasible, is something that would be considered by the Australian Government should an appropriate and approved vaccine become available with safety and efficacy data to support its use.

[Back to top](#)

Can wildlife be treated once they are infected?

Unfortunately, **wildlife that become infected and develop signs of illness from H5 bird flu generally die within a few days of becoming sick.**

Treatment to support rare, protected or valuable species could be considered on a case-by-case basis if the biosecurity risks and the animal's welfare can be adequately managed, but success rates overseas have been poor in most cases.

Because wildlife that become sick with H5 bird flu have a poor prognosis for recovery, ongoing conservation actions supporting wildlife protection from co-existing threats (such as invasive predators or habitat impacts), including safeguarding captive populations, are critical to promoting population resilience in the event of a bird flu outbreak.

[Back to top](#)

What have we learnt from H5 bird flu overseas?

We are fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from overseas experiences with H5 bird flu and adapt these to the Australian context.

It has been well recognised internationally that it is not possible to prevent wildlife movements that spread H5 bird flu, and nor is it possible to prevent susceptible wildlife from getting sick. Overseas experiences with H5 bird flu have shown the importance of being prepared, to help protect Australia's wildlife, agriculture and communities.

Since the emergence of H5 bird flu in 2021, wildlife experts in Australia have consulted closely with government officials, ecologists, rehabilitators, veterinarians and other stakeholders overseas, to ensure that the experience in other regions informs the approach to preparedness in Australia. This continued consultation is central to our understanding of this disease and its impacts on wildlife.

Healthy habitats and strong populations give native species the best chance to withstand the impacts of H5 bird flu. This means continuing efforts to support species recovery, build resilience, strong ecosystems and reduce other threats.

What should I do if I suspect H5 bird flu in a wild animal?

If you suspect a wild bird or other 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. Try to include: date and time, location (GPS pin, nearby roads or landmarks, type or description of birds or animals, how many birds or other animals are sick or dead, what they look like (freshly dead or just bones, signs of disease), and **if safe, take photos or ideally a video.**
- **REPORT** sick or dead wild animals via the [Emergency Animal Disease \(EAD\) Hotline](#) on 1800 675 888¹.

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 testing or other investigation. Even if testing is not undertaken, all reports help inform our understanding of the disease and how to manage it.

More information is available from the Wildlife Health Australia [H5 bird flu](#) resource centre, including advice for the general public on '[What to do if you encounter sick or dead wildlife](#)'.

[Back to top](#)

What happens after I report?

We can all play a role in protecting Australia's unique wildlife from H5 bird flu by reporting sick or dead wildlife and taking steps to reduce the risk of spreading the disease. Advice from the government in your jurisdiction may also change over time as the situation in Australia develops, so it is important follow the most recent advice.

When you call the [Emergency Animal Disease \(EAD\) Hotline](#) on 1800 675 888 to report, select the jurisdiction where you have seen the sick or dead wildlife, and you will be directed to the government in that jurisdiction. Reporting will alert authorities so they can evaluate the need for testing or other investigation. In some cases, investigation or testing may not be feasible or required if the risk is assessed as low. Even if testing is not undertaken, all reports help inform our understanding of the disease and how to manage it.

For more information on what to do about dead wildlife on your property, see [Wildlife and bird flu - DAFF](#). If you are not the property owner, leave any dead birds or animals where they are and report what

¹ 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.

you have found. Leaving carcasses is sometimes safer and less disruptive as clean-up could cause wild birds to scatter and spread the virus further.

[Back to top](#)

What is being done to monitor for H5 bird flu in Australian wild birds?

In monitoring wild birds, Australia uses a combination of testing healthy wild birds to look for avian influenza viruses based on risk analysis (called 'targeted surveillance'), as well as testing wildlife that is found sick or dead to determine if H5 bird flu was present and if it caused the illness or death (called 'general surveillance').

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** as part of targeted surveillance to look for bird flu viruses. Since the inception of this program, over 164,000 samples have been tested. Wildlife Health Australia coordinates 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.

Following the detections of H5 bird flu in June 2026, enhanced wildlife surveillance is underway as part of the response effort. Surveillance includes responding to reports of sickness and deaths in wildlife through the [Emergency Animal Disease \(EAD\) Hotline](#), as well as targeted monitoring of presumed healthy waterbirds and local non-migratory shorebirds.

[Back to top](#)

How has Australia been 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 continue to **work collaboratively to prepare and plan for the potential impacts of H5 bird flu**.

The Australian Government has committed more than \$113 million to strengthen surveillance, preparedness and response capability for H5 bird flu. This includes support to bolster the resilience of wild populations so that they are better able to withstand the impacts of H5 bird flu. See the [Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry](#) and [Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water](#) websites for more information.

[Back to top](#)

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 sick or dead wild animals to the [Emergency Animal Disease Hotline](#) on [1800 675 888](#).

If in doubt, [AVOID, RECORD, REPORT](#).

Wildlife Health Australia has developed an [H5 bird flu](#) resource centre with numerous resources for people who work with wildlife, including:

- **Risk Mitigation Toolboxes** to assist [wildlife managers](#) and [wildlife care providers](#) with their preparations for H5 bird flu in Australia.
- **Advice** for [veterinarians and other animal health professionals](#) and [people working with wildlife in the field](#), including the signs of H5 bird flu, how to report, and information on biosecurity and personal protective equipment.
- [AviFluMap](#) is an online tool designed to support wildlife managers and biosecurity stakeholders in assessing and responding to the risk of H5 bird flu in Australia's wild bird populations.

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

[Back to top](#)

I have pets, how do I keep them safe from H5 bird flu?

H5 bird flu mainly affects birds. Pet birds (including backyard chickens) and other domestic animals (such as cats and dogs) can get sick if they eat or interact with infected animals.

To help protect your pets and wildlife:

- keep dogs on a leash, especially near wild birds, and keep cats indoors
- if you've had direct contact with sick or dead birds, shower and change clothes before touching your pets
- prevent wild birds from interacting with your pets
- prevent wild birds from accessing your pet's food and water
- don't let pets eat or touch sick or dead animals

If your pet gets sick after interacting with wild birds, keep them away from children and other animals and contact your vet.

For more information, see [Prepare pets and wildlife for H5 bird flu - DCCEEW](#) and [Help protect against bird flu - DAFF](#). Information for owners of pet birds and backyard chickens is available at [Bird owners and bird flu - DAFF](#).

[Back to top](#)