

AVIAN INFLUENZA FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CURRENT OUTBREAK, PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT AND EGG SUPPLY

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza (AI), a virus commonly known as the “bird flu” or H5N1, is an infectious disease of birds caused by type A strains of the influenza virus. There are both low-pathogenic and high-pathogenic strains; the strains currently causing concern in the U.S. are highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

What should Americans know about the U.S. bird flu outbreak?

The United States has been experiencing an ongoing outbreak of bird flu on poultry farms across the country for the past several years. The CDC reinforces the current risk to the public remains low and USDA confirms avian influenza cannot be transmitted through safely handled and thoroughly cooked eggs or poultry.

Can I catch bird flu from the eggs or meat I eat?

The USDA³ and the FDA⁴ say consumers can be confident in the safety of eggs, and the CDC reinforces the current risk to the public remains low.⁵ The likelihood that eggs from infected poultry are in the retail market is low, due to safeguards in place, which include testing of flocks and federal inspection programs. The CDC also confirms that avian influenza cannot be transmitted through safely handled and thoroughly cooked eggs or poultry.

What can consumers expect from egg prices and supply?

Eggs are still a great value at the grocery store and are one of the highest-quality proteins available. HPAI may have a disruptive effect on the availability of eggs, resulting in price changes or intermittent shortages. Egg farms impacted by the more recent HPAI cases are recovering and getting back to egg production much faster than those affected in 2015. Even as supply may be temporarily strained, the U.S. egg supply overall is robust and safe with about 300 million egg laying hens in the country.

Can humans contract the disease?

Human infections with HPAI virus are rare, according to the CDC. People with work or recreational exposure to infected animals may be at increased risk and should follow recommended precautions, including wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). Avian influenza can't be transmitted through properly handled and thoroughly cooked eggs or meats.

What is happening with avian influenza and dairy cattle?

In March 2024, the first report of HPAI in dairy cattle was announced; 334 herds have been affected. USDA confirmed in a June 2024 report¹ that epidemiological tests indicate egg-laying flocks in Michigan and Texas that were positive for HPAI had been confirmed to be infected with the specific virus strain that had previously been found in HPAI-positive dairy cows. The report says the virus was likely spread to cattle from wild birds, and subsequently from dairy farms to poultry farms through a yet unknown route.² Egg farmers have enhanced biosecurity protocols in response to this new concern and are collaborating with animal health officials evaluating the dairy detections.

Egg farmers across the US are committed to doing all that is possible to minimize disruption and keep grocery stores stocked with safe and nutritious eggs.

1. 2024 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5N1) - Michigan Dairy Herd and Poultry Flock Summary (usda.gov)

2. <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/hpai-dairy-faqs.pdf>

3. <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/avian-influenza-food-safety-qa.pdf>

4. <https://www.fda.gov/food/egg-guidance-regulation-and-other-information/questions-and-answers-regarding-safety-eggs-during-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-outbreaks>

5. <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/spotlights/h5n1-low-risk-public.html>

