



Berkshire County MA

January 17, 2025

Public Health Situation Alert – Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza and Chicken Flocks

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A (H5N1) has been circulating in birds in the United States for years. Recently it has also been found in many common mammals, including humans who have had direct contact with infected animals such as cows, cats, horses, dogs, and others. Until now most human infections were mild and could be traced to interactions with cows. Now there is evidence that H5N1 has mutated and at least one human has died following sickness via direct contact with his infected chickens. There has still been no evidence of human-to-human infections. [Avian Influenza Type A | Bird Flu | CDC](#) [Avian Influenza | Mass.gov](#)

Anyone keeping chickens or cows should always practice good hygiene when around sick animals, including wearing a mask, eye protection washing hands and disinfecting boots. Never bring a sick animal into your house. Farmers with flocks of birds or herds of cows should follow the guidelines from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR). <https://www.mass.gov/doc/prevent-exposure-to-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-virus-in-your-poultry-flock/download>. [Joint Dairy Organization Statement on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Cows - IDFA](#)

[USDA Builds on Actions to Protect Livestock and Public Health From H5N1 Avian Influenza | Home](#)

Raw cows' milk has been shown to contain live H5N1 virus though not proven to cause infection. Raw milk consumption should be avoided by everyone as the risks far outweigh any perceived benefits. Pasteurization has been shown to kill H5N1 as well as numerous other viruses and bacteria that may cause illness.

If you have questions or concerns about your flock or herd, contact MDAR or your veterinarian. If you have medical questions or concerns about your health, contact your medical provider. If you have questions about this situation alert, please contact your local Board of Health or bcboha@berkshireplanning.org which is the Berkshire County Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coalition.

The situation is rapidly evolving. Stay informed and follow information from reliable government and academic sources.

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