



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES-DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH-RABIES CONTROL PROGRAM

## What is Bird Flu?

Bird flu is a virus that infects birds. There are many types of bird flu, and most cause only mild disease in birds. There is one type, called **Asian Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1, or Asian H5N1**, that has spread to many countries and is causing disease and death in birds. Small numbers of people and some cats have also caught this virus. This virus is nowhere in United States right now. The virus might be brought in to the United States by birds brought in illegally. Infected migrating waterbirds (like ducks, geese, herons, sandpipers) might also bring the virus here. Health officials are concerned that the virus could mutate (change) and become very contagious from person to person – this would be called PANDEMIC FLU. This has not happened, and the virus is mainly a bird disease. See [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).

### How is the virus spread?

Birds infected with Asian H5N1 have the virus in their feces. It is very easily spread from bird-to-bird. It is not easy for a person or a cat to catch it. Most people who caught the virus got it by handling their own infected flock of chickens. These people most likely were exposed to a large amount of virus or got it deep in their lungs. A few cats and one dog got the virus by eating dead birds (raw).

The virus can be transported by movement of infected birds from one country to another, by the sharing of equipment that has bird feces stuck to it, and by infected migrating birds.

### Symptoms

**Chickens and turkeys** often die suddenly from the Asian H5N1 virus. They may also have swelling and purple blotches on the legs and face, tiredness, diarrhea, cough, and sneeze. **Ducks** that are infected do not always show symptoms but still have virus in their feces. Over 80 types of birds can catch the virus and many of them die from it.

**People** who have caught the virus have had fever, shortness of breath, and sometimes diarrhea. About half of these people died.

**Cats** that were infected had fever, shortness of breath, cough and sneeze, and death. There is one confirmed report of a dog that died after eating an infected duck (in Thailand).

**Report dead birds in  
Los Angeles County  
877-747-2243**



### Prevention

This information will help protect your family from Asian H5N1 bird flu, if it arrives, and from other diseases (E coli, Salmonella, Hantavirus etc) that are already here.

#### 1. Clean hands and surfaces often.

- Wash hands every time after handling animals, their food or water bowls or bedding, or after touching soiled surfaces.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water (20 seconds or longer)
- Waterless hand sanitizers also kill germs on hands.
- Never touch your face unless you have washed your hands.
- Wash animal bedding, food and water bowls often.
- Most disinfectants kill the virus on surfaces.
- Direct sunlight helps kill the virus.

#### 2. Practice food safety.

- Keep animals away from cooking and eating areas.
- Do not eat rare meat or partially-cooked eggs.
- Wash home-grown eggs with soap and water before cracking open.
- Clean and disinfect all utensils and surfaces touched by raw meat or eggs.

#### 3. Do not breathe in dirty dust.

- When cleaning animal areas, have good ventilation.
- Spray and wipe. Do not sweep or vacuum dust that might contain animal feces.
- Change clothes and wash hands after cleaning an animal area.

**Bird owners.** Protect your family by protecting your birds. Keep all new birds away from your old birds for 3-4 weeks. Keep all wild birds and their feces away from your birds. Wash all bird cages and equipment often.

**Cat and dog owners.** If there is an outbreak of the virus in Los Angeles County, it is best to keep your cats indoors and your dogs on a leash to prevent them from eating infected birds. No person has caught the virus from a cat or dog.