

Animal Health Alert: H5 bird flu confirmed in four domestic cats that consumed recalled raw milk, and in one cat that consumed commercially produced raw pet food.

12.20.2024

Key Points:

- Five indoor-only, domestic cats in one household in Los Angeles (LA) County died after consuming recalled raw milk. **Four of these cats were tested and confirmed to be infected with H5 Bird Flu.** This group includes the two cats described in an earlier alert issued 12/12/2024.
- There are additional recalls on raw dairy products. The current recalls include:
 - All sizes of raw milk and cream produced by Raw Farm, LLC in California between November 9-27, 2024 (lot numbers 20241109 through 20241127).
 - All “Valley Milk Simply Bottle Raw Cow Milk” and “DESI Milk Raw Cow Milk” distributed in quart (32oz), half-gallon (64 oz), and one-gallon (128 oz) plastic juges with a code date marked on the container of “DEC 23 2024 through DEC 30 2024”, produced by Valley Milk Simply Bottled of Stanislaus County.
- From a separate household in LA County, a symptomatic cat has tested presumptive positive for H5 bird flu after consuming two different brands of raw pet food composed of raw poultry and raw beef. The investigation for this case is currently ongoing.
- Animal health staff should specifically ask pet owners about exposure to raw milk and raw diets, share information about the risk of raw milk and raw diets, and caution pet owners **NOT** to consume raw dairy products, nor offer them to pets.
- Animal health staff should wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when in contact with animals suspected or confirmed of being infected with H5 bird flu; acutely sick animals that have history of exposure to raw milk or raw milk products, wild birds or raw or undercooked animal products.
- Animal health staff are strongly recommended to receive their seasonal flu vaccine. Although this vaccine is not proven to prevent infection with H5 Bird Flu, it can help protect staff from seasonal human flu which is circulating right now.
- **REPORT** suspected cases of H5 bird flu in cats and other animals. Testing for the virus may be available. A complete dietary history for the animal (including raw dairy, raw poultry and/or meat, and bird exposure) is needed.

Dear Veterinary Colleagues:

On 11/22/24, eight cats in one household were offered raw milk produced by Raw Farm, LLC. The raw milk was from a lot that was not included in the recalls issued on 11/24/24 and 11/27/24 but was included in the third recall issued on 12/3/24. Between November 20 and December 7, 2024, seven of the cats became ill. Between December 2-10, five died or were euthanized. The other two cats are under quarantine and improving. This group includes the two cats described in an [earlier alert issued on 12/12/2024](#). Clinical signs were variable but

progressive. They included fever, lethargy, dehydration, anorexia, icterus, respiratory distress, and neurologic signs (primarily seizures, although one had nystagmus). One cat had evidence of lung lobe consolidation.

Of the five deceased cats that drank the recalled raw milk, four were tested for influenza A by PCR testing of samples from multiple body sites (oropharyngeal, rectal, and/or brain). All samples collected were confirmed positive for Influenza A, and further subtyped as H5N1 also known as H5 Bird Flu, by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL). These are the first confirmed cases of H5 bird flu infections in cats in Los Angeles County. They were sequenced by NVSL with sequences identical to the raw milk they ingested which was recalled from Raw Farms. H5 bird flu has been detected in domestic cats in other states since the beginning of this national and international outbreak that began in wild birds in late 2021.

From a separate household in LA County, Veterinary Public Health is investigating five indoor-only domestic cats that became ill presumably after consuming two different brands of raw pet food diets composed of raw poultry and raw beef. Approximately 2 weeks after consuming the raw diets, two cats presented with acute respiratory distress to veterinary clinics and were humanely euthanized. One of these cats had known pre-existing cardiac disease. Two other cats presented with symptoms including lethargy, reduced appetite, upper respiratory, neurologic, and ocular signs of disease. One cat was treated for corneal edema and uveitis in one eye. The other cat displayed ataxia, uveitis and bilateral retinal detachment in both eyes and was tested with a respiratory panel from a commercial veterinary diagnostic laboratory, which resulted as presumptive positive for Influenza A and Feline Calicivirus. This sample was further detected as positive for H5 bird flu at the California Animal Health and Food Safety (CAHFS) Laboratory and the sample will be sent to NVSL for confirmation, subtyping, and sequencing. The investigation is ongoing and includes testing of the raw pet food diets by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Influenza A is rarely detected in cats. These are the first cats in LA County to be confirmed positive for H5 bird flu. These are also the first animals reported to have become ill after ingestion of raw milk purchased from a store before it was recalled for H5 bird flu contamination.

H5 bird flu is currently circulating in wild birds locally. There has been a total of 39 confirmed cases of H5 bird flu in wild birds detected in LA County since September 2022. Of these, six H5 bird flu cases were confirmed in wild birds in LA County in 2024. While primarily affecting poultry, H5 bird flu infections in cattle, cats, and other mammals highlight the potential for the virus to mutate and become more transmissible among mammals, including humans.

Currently, there is no evidence of local cat-to-cat, cat-to-human or human-to-human spread of H5 bird flu, and the risk to the general public continues to be low. However, people who come into close contact with animals, especially wild birds and their feces, infected cats, infected poultry, or with infected dairy cattle or their milk, have a higher level of risk of exposure. It is

important to take proper precautions. Please see [Considerations for Veterinarians: Evaluating and Handling of Cats Potentially Exposed to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A \(H5N1\) Virus](#). Guidance and resources for veterinary staff, farm workers and for the general public can also be found on our [LA County Veterinary Public Health Program website](#).

Raw Milk Recalls:

There is a [broad, voluntary recall of all Raw Farm, LLC raw milk and cream products due to possible H5 bird flu contamination](#) that went into effect 12/3/24. The recall includes all sizes of Raw Farm milk and cream, produced between November 9 and November 27, 2024. The affected lot numbers are 20241109 through 20241127. While this voluntary recall only applies to raw whole milk and cream, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) urges consumers to avoid consuming any Raw Farm products for human consumption including raw milk, cream, cheese, and kefir, as well as raw milk pet food topper and pet food kefir marketed to pet owners.

On December 14, another raw milk recall was issued by the California Department of Agriculture (CDFA). [This recall applies to raw milk produced by Valley Milk Simply Bottled of Stanislaus County](#). This applies to all “Valley Milk Simply Bottle Raw Cow Milk” and “DESI Milk Raw Cow Milk” distributed in quart (32oz), half-gallon (64 oz), and one-gallon (128 oz) plastic jug with a code date marked on the container of DEC 23 2024 through DEC 30 2024. Currently no illness in pets or people have been reported in Los Angeles County associated with this milk.

Consumption of H5 bird flu-infected raw milk has been shown to cause severe illness and death in mammals, especially cats. There have been multiple reports of deaths in barn cats living at dairy farms with H5 bird flu outbreaks. Raw dairy products marketed for pets, including frozen raw dairy products, may be sold across state lines, and are regulated differently than raw dairy products for humans. There are also unregulated products that be obtained from unlicensed farms or individuals. **It is strongly recommended not to feed any raw dairy products to pets.** The CDC recommends against consuming raw milk contaminated with live H5 bird flu virus as a way to develop antibodies against the H5 bird flu virus to protect against future disease.

Freezing does not kill viruses and does not kill most bacteria. Frozen raw dairy products should be considered to carry the same level of risk for infectious disease exposure as refrigerated raw dairy products.

Actions requested of animal health staff in LA County:

- **Share information about the recalls of raw milk and cream products with pet owners.** [Counsel pet owners about the risks to both human and pet health](#) when feeding raw dairy, raw poultry and raw meat diets.
 - [Raw Farm, LLC](#)
 - [Valley Milk Simply Bottled](#)

- **Identify potential cases of H5 bird flu in pets.** Consider H5 bird flu in any pet that had exposure to recalled raw milk or wild birds, especially if they have fever, severe lethargy, icterus, hepatopathy, tachypnea, uveitis, or neurologic signs such as seizures, nystagmus, or blindness.
- **Take a detailed diet history for each pet.** If raw dairy, raw poultry or raw meat products were fed, obtain names, lot numbers, best before dates of each product and when they were fed. Pictures of the front and back surfaces of each product are very helpful, as well as an image of the receipt from where it was purchased. Both opened and unopened products can be kept sealed in plastic bags and frozen until further instructions are received.
- **Veterinarians, veterinary staff, and animal health workers in LA County should wear appropriate personal [protective equipment \(PPE\)](#)** when having contact with sick cats that have history of exposure to raw milk/milk products or that are suspected or confirmed to have H5 bird flu.
- **Veterinary facilities should be prepared to discuss reported cases with the Department of Public Health,** provide medical records, and provide information about staff exposed to sick animals to facilitate monitoring and protection of employee health.
- **If you are seeing a potential case of H5 Bird Flu in an animal in LA County**
 - **What to do**
 - Place the animal in isolation.
 - Limit the number of staff handling the animal as much as possible.
 - Instruct staff that handle the animal to wear appropriate PPE, which includes an N95 mask, gloves, eye protection, shoe protection, and a gown, at minimum.
 - Collect detailed information about the potential exposure to H5 Bird Flu, including a detailed dietary history as described above, and any exposure to wild birds or other animals.
 - **Report the suspected case to Veterinary Public Health.**
 - Please use our [HPAI-specific reporting form](#) when notifying VPH of any suspected cases. Please also contact our Veterinarian on Call at 213-288-7060 and vet@ph.lacounty.gov.
 - **What to Expect**
 - One of our Public Health Veterinarians will call you to discuss the case.
 - Free testing for influenza A virus and H5 bird flu may be available through our laboratory. We may provide you with a test kit for this purpose.
 - If the animal tests positive for Influenza A, The Department of Public Health will contact all staff that handled the animal in order to monitor their health for 10 days after the last exposure, as well as offer testing and post-exposure treatment if indicated.
 - Inform the pet owner that they may be called by a Public Health Veterinarian to learn more about the case.

Veterinarians and animal health workers are encouraged to contact us with any questions by email: vet@ph.lacounty.gov, or by phone: 213-288-7060 (Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm). Please visit our [VPH webpage for more information about H5 bird flu](#).

Resources:

- LA County Department of Public Health News Release – December 19, 2024 – [Public Health Warns Against Consuming Raw Milk Following Additional Detections of H5 Bird Flu Virus](#)
- LA County Department of Public Health News Release – December 18, 2024 – [Updated: Confirmed H5 Bird Flu Detected in Los Angeles County Cats that Consumed Recalled Raw Milk – Public Health Investigating Additional Possible Cases in Cats](#)
- LA County Veterinary Public Health Program (VPH) - [H5 Bird Flu in Los Angeles County](#)
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH) - Raw Milk Recall Notice
 - 12/3/2024 – Raw Farm LLC. [State Secures Broad Voluntary Recall of Raw Milk and Cream to Protect Consumers](#)
- California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) – Raw Milk Recall Notice
 - 12/14/24 – Valley Milk Simply Bottled of Stanislaus County - <https://pressreleases.cdfa.ca.gov/Home/PressRelease/63398203>
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH) – [Current Bird Flu Situation](#)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – [Considerations for Veterinarians: Evaluating and Handling of Cats Potentially Exposed to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A \(H5N1\) Virus](#)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – [Influenza in Animals](#)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – [H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation](#)
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA) – [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Detections in Mammals](#)

Sincerely,

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Please email vet@ph.lacounty.gov if you wish to unsubscribe or need other AHAN-related assistance. To sign up for future Animal Health Alerts or to view previously released AHANs, please visit <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/AHAN.htm>.