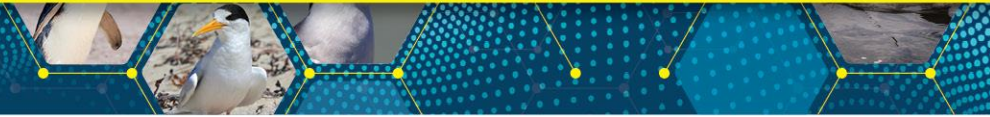




H5 Avian Influenza (bird flu)



What is H5 avian influenza?

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) is Western Australia's lead agency for H5 avian influenza (H5 bird flu).

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) is preparing for the arrival of H5 bird flu, or H5 avian influenza (specifically high pathogenicity avian influenza H5N1 strain 2.3.4.4b), a serious and highly contagious strain that has moved quickly around the world. To date, there has been no reported outbreaks of H5 bird flu in wildlife or domesticated animals in Australia and New Zealand, but the threat of the virus entering with migrating birds has increased.

Wild, farmed and pet birds can catch H5 bird flu. Overseas, other animals have also been infected by this strain. This includes marine mammals and cases have also been detected in other mammals such as dairy cattle and cats.

A small number of human infections (mostly mild) of the H5 bird flu have been reported overseas. The likelihood of humans becoming infected is low and there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission with the current strain. Most infected people had close contact with infected animals and contaminated environments.

What is the threat to wildlife?

Since 2020, the H5N1 strain of avian influenza has been causing unprecedented outbreaks of disease in a wide range of domestic and wild birds and mammals in every continent except Australia. In other countries, it has:

- caused severe disease and high death rates in wild birds
- infected more than 500 bird species
- infected more than 60 species of mammals including seals, dairy cattle, cats, foxes, dogs and pigs
- infected people who worked closely with infected animals or environments contaminated with bird droppings
- the ability to directly infect poultry and cause severe disease immediately.

What are the signs?

The signs of avian influenza can vary between different species of birds. In wild birds, signs can include:

- sudden death
- lack of coordination, tremors, swimming in circles
- twisted necks or other abnormal posture
- inability to stand or fly
- diarrhoea
- difficulty breathing, coughing or sneezing
- swelling around the head, neck and eyes
- cloudiness or change in colour of the eyes.

H5 bird flu can also infect mammals, usually the result of the mammal eating an infected animal or having close contact with an environment the infected birds have contaminated. Signs in mammals can include neurological (lack of coordination, circling) or respiratory signs (nasal or eye discharge, difficulty breathing) or sudden death.

Response during an outbreak

Australia has well-established national response arrangements in place to respond to H5 avian influenza.

If Australia experiences an outbreak, there will be a rapid and coordinated national response led by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), with state and territory governments leading response activities within their borders.

What is DBCA's role?

DBCA's role includes raising awareness among wildlife stakeholders, including wildlife rehabilitators, and other licensees, commercial tour operators and businesses operating on department-managed lands.

DBCA will also develop response strategies for key native species and sites at high risk including captive populations at Perth Zoo. DBCA staff may also respond to outbreaks, to assist with managing sick or dead birds, and access to department-managed lands.

As those involved in wild bird rehabilitation may be the first to recognise the signs of an outbreak of H5 avian influenza in wildlife, vets and wildlife rehabilitators can play important roles in early detection of this disease. As well as being aware of the signs of H5 avian influenza, appropriate biosecurity measures should be implemented by all individuals that handle wild birds or mammals. This includes:

- correct use and removal of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- disposal of, or appropriately cleaning and disinfecting PPE and equipment after handling each animal (if practical).

Biosecurity plans should be in place for veterinary hospitals and wildlife facilities which should include, but not be limited to:

- correct use and removal of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- protocols for handling, examining, treating and admitting potentially infected animals
- protocols for entering and exiting, as well as cleaning an isolation area

- protocols for the disposal of possibly infected animals.

What should the public do if they see sick or dead wild birds?

Avoid – Sick and dead birds and mammals can carry diseases, including avian influenza, that can affect humans. It is recommended to avoid contact with wildlife that are sick or have died unexpectedly unless you have appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and the risk of leaving the birds/animals in place outweighs the risk of spreading infection by moving them. International experience shows that most affected wildlife will not recover, so it is usually best not to move affected animals and stress them further unless they pose a public health risk. Make sure you keep children and pets away from sick or dead birds or other wildlife.

Record – If you see sick or dead wild birds or other wildlife, note the number of dead, species, location, date and time.

Report – Reporting signs of avian influenza is important to enable early detection and to monitor the level and locations of H5 avian influenza if it arrives in Australia.

Under WA's Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007, any strain of avian influenza is a notifiable disease and anyone who suspects the disease is present must report it.



AVOID

Do not touch dead birds or other animals



RECORD

Take photos or a video, record your location



REPORT SICK OR DEAD ANIMALS

5 or more: Emergency Animal Disease 1800 675 888
5 or less: Wildcare Helpline 9474 9055