

HEALTH ADVISORY

Detection of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) A (H5N1) Virus in Alameda County December 9, 2024

SITUATION:

Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) confirmed the first case of influenza A (H5N1) or “bird flu” in an Alameda County resident. This was the first reported infection in a child in the U.S., and no further spread or source of exposure was identified. The current public health risk for influenza A (H5N1) infection remains low. There are ongoing outbreaks of H5N1 in dairy cattle and poultry farms in other counties in California. Clinicians are asked to consider influenza A(H5N1) in patients with upper respiratory symptoms and exposure to sick/dead birds, wildlife or domesticated animals or exposure to unpasteurized (raw) milk or milk products. In these patients, nasopharyngeal/oropharyngeal and conjunctival swabs (if applicable) should be collected and sent for PCR; if your lab does not subtype influenza A, please send them to the Alameda County Public Health Laboratory for subtyping.

BACKGROUND:

H5N1 is a type of influenza A virus that primarily affects birds but can also infect mammals. Influenza A(H5N1) is considered highly pathogenic due to high disease severity in poultry. Human infections are rare, but can occur, especially among those with exposure to infected animals. As of December 9, 2024, [there are 58 confirmed human cases](#) in the United States, with 32 cases reported in California. Most cases in California are associated with exposure to infected dairy cattle.

The case in Alameda County was the first reported infection in a child in the United States and was detected through routine surveillance by their health care provider. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed influenza A(H5N1). Repeat testing 4 days after the initial test was negative for influenza A but was positive for other common respiratory viruses. The child experienced mild symptoms, no conjunctivitis and received antivirals. The case investigation revealed no known exposures to infected animals or raw milk and there was no evidence of person-to-person spread.

H5N1 has also been detected in raw milk in unpasteurized (raw) milk retail products in California. Information about affected products and recalls may be found [here](#). There are no confirmed cases of H5N1 due to unpasteurized (raw) milk consumption, but direct exposure to unpasteurized milk has led to infections in dairy workers. Consumers should return the product to the store where purchased. **Pasteurized milk remains safe to drink.**

ACTIONS REQUESTED OF CLINICIANS:

1. Clinicians should call **Alameda County Department of Public Health (510) 267-3250** if avian influenza is suspected to determine if testing is warranted and to recommend appropriate specimens to collect.
2. Clinicians should consider influenza A(H5N1) virus infection in people showing signs or symptoms of acute respiratory illness or conjunctivitis, especially **among those with**

exposure to sick or dead wild and domesticated animals and livestock with suspected or confirmed influenza A (H5N1) infection or **exposure to raw milk products in the prior 10 days.**

- a. Clinicians should test for Influenza A through their clinic or commercial lab. If positive for Influenza A, send to ACPHL if:
 - i. Subtyping is not available through clinic or commercial lab
 - ii. Subtyping was attempted but did not identify **seasonal** Influenza A
3. If **respiratory** signs and symptoms consistent with influenza A(H5N1) are present collect the following to send to ACPHL for subtyping:
 - a. A separate oropharyngeal swab **and** nasal swab is preferred **OR**
 - b. A nasopharyngeal swab
 - c. **Note:** Antigen testing should not be used when influenza A(H5N1) infection is suspected
4. If signs and symptoms of **conjunctivitis** are present (with or without respiratory symptoms) collect the following and send to ACPHL for subtyping:
 - a. A conjunctival swab **AND**
 - i. An oropharyngeal swab and nasal swab **OR**
 - ii. A nasopharyngeal swab
5. If H5N1 is suspected, **antiviral treatment should not be delayed** while waiting for laboratory testing. Interim guidance from CDC on treatment can be found [here](#).
 - a. The patient should be isolated, and proper PPE should be used; encourage patients to isolate at home away from household members until [isolation can be discontinued](#)

Resources:

1. [H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation](#)
2. [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Virus: Identification of Human Infection and Recommendations for Investigations and Response](#)
3. [Detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza \(HPAI\) A\(H5N1\) in California dairy cattle](#)
4. [CDPH Warns Against Drinking Second Lot of Raw Milk Following Bird Flu Detection](#)
5. [CDC confirms H5N1 Bird Flu Infection in a Child in California](#)
6. [TO: Healthcare Providers and Clinical and Commercial Laboratories Influenza A Testing Guidance: Enhanced Surveillance During the Summer Months](#)
7. [Human Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Quicksheet](#)
8. [Evaluation and Testing for Human Avian Influenza A H5N1 Infection](#)