



HPAI Guidance Public Spaces

Date: March 19, 2025

Public Health Message Type: Alert Advisory Update Information

Intended Audience: All public health partners Healthcare providers Infection preventionists
 Local health departments Schools/child care centers ACOs
 Animal health professionals Other:

Key Points or Updates:

- Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI, also known as H5N1, bird flu, avian flu) has been detected in wild birds in New Jersey. While the risk of transmission to the general public is low, precautions should be taken to minimize potential exposure. The following guidance provides recommendations for recreational area users and public health officials.
- Currently, the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) does not recommend closing parks, beaches, or other outdoor recreational areas solely due to the detection of HPAI in wild birds.
- Other precautions short of total closure (e.g., limiting access to areas where dead birds are located, or due to significant fecal contamination of beaches, ponds, or playgrounds) may be appropriate.

Public Health Recommendations for the Use of Recreational Areas Impacted by HPAI:

- **Avoid Contact with Wild Birds and Their Habitats**
Although the risk of HPAI transmission to the general public remains low, direct contact with infected animals or contaminated surfaces increases the risk. The public should be advised to take the following precautions:
 - Avoid handling sick or dead wild birds.
 - Do not approach, touch or feed ducks, geese, swans, or other waterfowl.
 - Be aware that wild birds can carry bird flu even if they appear healthy.
- **Reporting Sick or Dead Birds**
Sick or dead birds should be reported to NJDEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife at 1-877-WARNDEP.
- **Concerns Around Potentially Contaminated Public Areas**
As the risk of HPAI transmission to the general public is currently low, NJDOH does not recommend closing parks, beaches, or other outdoor recreational areas solely due to HPAI detection in wild birds. However, the public should be advised to take precautions to minimize potential exposure while using these areas by avoiding contact with birds, other wild animals, and droppings. If a large

number of sick or dead birds or animals are present, NJDEP should be notified, and the Local Health Department may recommend further actions. Under NJAC 8:26-8.5, local health authorities may close bathing areas if there is a significant risk of human exposure.

- **Avoid Contaminated Surfaces**

The public should be advised to not touch lake/pond water, feathers, or other surfaces potentially contaminated by birds or their droppings. If contact occurs, people should wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. People should avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with contaminated hands.

- **Practice Good Hygiene**

While there are no known human HPAI infections due to merely being near wild bird droppings during recreation, it is still advisable to avoid contact. People who have been in areas with high concentrations of wild birds or droppings, especially where HPAI has been detected, should be advised to wash hands thoroughly or use sanitizer, clean or disinfect footwear and wash any potentially contaminated clothing before interacting with domestic birds or other animals and pets.

- **Protect Pets**

- Dogs: When using parks or other recreational areas, dogs should always remain leashed and should be kept away from wild birds, dead animals, and areas contaminated with bird droppings.
- Cats: Cats are highly susceptible to HPAI and should be kept indoors at all times.

- **Public Notification**

Recreational area users should be notified through signage, websites, and other channels about:

- The potential presence of HPAI in the area.
- The current risk level to the public.
- Recommended precautions to protect themselves and their pets.

Contact Information:

- For questions, the Communicable Disease Service can be reached at (609) 826-5964 during business hours

Additional Resources

1. NJ H5N1-Bird Flu Webpage
<https://www.nj.gov/H5N1/>
2. CDC Information on Prevention of Avian Influenza A Viruses in People
<https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/prevention/index.html>
3. American Veterinary Medical Association: Avian influenza in pets and backyard flocks
<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-health/avian-influenza/avian-influenza-companion-animals>
4. US Department of Agriculture – H5N1 Influenza
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/h5n1-hpai>