



TOMÁS J. ARAGÓN, M.D., Dr.P.H
Director and State Public Health Officer

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
California Department of Public Health



GAVIN NEWSOM
Governor

April 19, 2024

Dear Dairy Farm Owner or Operator:

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is reaching out to you following the recent detection of [highly pathogenic avian influenza \(HPAI\) virus A \(H5N1\)](#) in dairy cattle in the United States. Although there have been no HPAI H5N1 avian influenza virus detections in California cattle herds to date, and the current risk to humans from avian influenza virus is estimated to be low, ***we recommend that you prepare now to protect workers should your herd become infected.*** This letter and attachments provide information and links to help you do so.

In March 2024, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) [confirmed](#) the presence of HPAI H5N1 virus, hereafter referred to as “avian influenza,” in dairy herds in several states. Because avian influenza can sicken and decrease milk production in dairy cattle and can potentially be transmitted to dairy workers who are in close contact with infected livestock, enhanced [biosecurity](#) is warranted to help prevent introduction and spread of this virus in herds.

In April 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [confirmed](#) the first known infection of a dairy worker with avian influenza when a dairy worker in Texas in close contact with sick animals tested positive. Prior to this detection, the only other known case in the U.S. was a person who assisted with euthanasia of an infected poultry flock in Colorado. Avian influenza has been found in [wild birds](#), [wild mammals](#), and [backyard and commercial poultry flocks](#) across the U.S., including in California. Worldwide, despite significant prevalence of this virus in both wild and domestic animals, since January 2022, [thirteen people](#) have become ill from avian influenza virus after contact with infected animals. Their illnesses ranged from mild (such as eye infection or cold symptoms) to severe (pneumonia), including one fatal case.

While the risk to human health from this strain of avian influenza remains low, all influenza viruses can evolve and change. Therefore, since this virus was first detected in the U.S. in late 2021, CDC, CDPH, and California local public health officials have been and will continue to closely monitor people for associated illnesses, particularly those who had contact with infected animals. We encourage and support your efforts to protect workers and prevent exposure.



Dairy Operation Owner/Operator
Page 2 of 4
April 19, 2024

The attachments to this letter provide recommendations to protect dairy workers from avian influenza virus. There are also links with additional information. For questions about preventing infections in people, contact your [local health department](#). Thank you for protecting your business and staff from avian influenza.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'KJ Cummings', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kristin J. Cummings, MD, MPH, Chief
Occupational Health Branch
California Department of Public Health

Recommendations for protecting dairy workers from Avian Influenza (H5N1)

Employers should take measures to protect workers from avian influenza virus infection if livestock become sick and you suspect or know it to be due to avian influenza infection.

- ❑ Respiratory protection and other personal protective equipment (PPE) should be provided to and worn by dairy workers who enter the hospital pen or go into any buildings that currently or previously housed sick or dead animals, carcasses, feces, or litter from potentially infected animals until the buildings have been decontaminated.
- ❑ Respirators must be at least as effective as an N95 respirator. Impermeable gloves, indirectly vented goggles (or full-face respirators), boots or boot covers, disposable fluid-resistant coveralls, and disposable head or hair cover should also be provided and worn to prevent infection, particularly for workers who have direct contact with ill cows or their milk. When working in enclosed areas, the [Cal/OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Diseases - Zoonotic](#) standard requires that workers wear elastomeric facepiece respirators or powered air purifying respirators (PAPRs) equipped with P100 or HEPA filters.
- ❑ Workers must be included in a respiratory protection program that includes medical clearance, training, and fit testing of their respirators. See Cal/OSHA's publication: [Respiratory Protection in the Workplace](#).
- ❑ Consumption of raw milk should be prohibited in the workplace and discouraged outside the workplace.
- ❑ If workers are known to have exposures to livestock infected with avian influenza virus, advise them that they will be contacted by their local public health department. Public health officials will monitor an exposed worker for symptoms of illness for several days following the worker's last possible exposure. Public health officials will also arrange for testing, in collaboration with the farm's occupational health provider, if an exposed worker develops symptoms suggestive of influenza.
- ❑ The most common symptoms of avian influenza in humans include eye redness (conjunctivitis), fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue, and shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. **If a dairy worker develops any of these [symptoms](#) after exposure to avian influenza virus infected animals, they should promptly notify their employer and the [local health department \(LHD\)](#).** The local health department will advise the dairy worker on seeking medical evaluation, avian influenza testing, and antiviral treatment. Testing, evaluation, and preventive treatment recommended by CDC, CDPH, or the local health officer for exposed employees must be provided at no cost to the employee and during the employee's working hours.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- [CDC, Recommendations for Worker Protection and Use of Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) to Reduce Exposure to Novel Influenza A Viruses Associated with Severe Disease in Humans](#)
- [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Detections in Livestock](#): This topic page provides information on detections of the virus and biosecurity recommendations for producers and veterinarians.
- [Cal/OSHA Regulation, "Aerosol Transmissible Diseases – Zoonotic" 8CCR §5199.1](#): California employers must provide medical services recommended by CDC, CDPH, or the local health officer to employees at increased risk for infections from animals that could be transmitted through the air.
- [Cal/OSHA, Respiratory Protection in the Workplace: Provides an overview of respiratory protection and the elements of a workplace respiratory protection program.](#)
- [American Industrial Hygiene Association \(AIHA\) List of Consultants Who Provide Respirator Fit Testing Services: Find a consultant in your area. Type in your zip code and select specialty "Respiratory Protection".](#)