



News Release

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State officials caution against touching sick or dead wild birds

OLYMPIA — Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) are asking the public to avoid contact with wild birds, especially sick or dead wild birds or their young. An outbreak of avian influenza, also known as bird flu, is impacting wild birds including Canada geese, snow geese, bald eagles, and other raptors. State officials are asking people who encounter sick or dead wild birds to alert WDFW using the agency's [reporting tool](#).

While avian influenza infections among people are [rare](#), human infections can happen when the virus gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth, or is inhaled. People may be at greater risk of bird flu virus infection during close or lengthy unprotected contact (not wearing respiratory protection or eye protection) with infected birds or surfaces contaminated with the mucous, saliva, or feces of infected birds.

“Although the risk to people is low, bringing a sick bird into your home or a veterinary hospital could spread an infection to humans and other animals,” said Tao Sheng Kwan-Gett, MD, Washington State Chief Science Officer at the Department of Health. “Don’t take a chance – the safest thing to do is to avoid all contact and report the bird to Fish and Wildlife.”

According to WDFW wildlife veterinarian Katie Haman, “Avian influenza in birds is often a fatal disease and, unfortunately, there isn't a vaccine or a treatment. Handling sick birds or

taking them to a veterinarian could spread the virus to new areas and increase the reach of the virus.”

Avian influenza viruses, such as the H5N1 strain currently circulating in the U.S., are also extremely contagious among certain domesticated bird species, and can sicken and kill chickens, pheasants, and turkeys, among other domestic fowl. The virus is often spread to domestic birds through interactions with wild birds.

Here is how to report both wild and domestic sick and dead birds:

- Use an [online form](#) to report sick/dead **wild birds** suspected of avian influenza to the [Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#).
- Report sick/dead **domestic birds** to Washington State Department of Agriculture's Avian Health Program: 1-800-606-3056 or visit [Avian Influenza | Washington State Department of Agriculture](#) for more information about how to protect backyard flocks.

Bird hunters should follow [standard safety steps](#) to avoid potential exposure to avian influenza and other viruses or bacteria.

If you develop flu-like symptoms within 10 days of contact with ill or dead wild birds, you should contact your [local health jurisdiction](#) and alert your healthcare provider to your recent contact with wild birds.

As a reminder, chicken, eggs and other poultry and poultry products are safe to eat when properly handled and cooked. Be sure to follow these steps for safer food:

- Wash hands and clean and sanitize work surfaces and equipment before and after contact with raw poultry.
- Don't wash meat, chicken, turkey, or eggs. Washing raw meat, chicken, turkey, or eggs can spread germs to your sink, countertops, and other surfaces in your kitchen. Cooking poultry thoroughly will kill harmful germs.
- Separate raw and cooked meat to avoid cross-contamination.
- Cook poultry thoroughly to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Keep poultry stored at 40 F or below or, in the freezer at 0 F or below.

Washington officials caution against touching dead or dying wild birds

June 7, 2022

Page 3

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