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**NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT**  
**Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza identified in New Mexico Cattle and Texas Resident**

April 4, 2024

**Background:**

The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) is urging healthcare providers to consider infection with highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) in patients who have had contact with animals or people with suspected or confirmed HPAI A(H5N1) in the previous 10 days and have clinically compatible [symptoms](#). Possible symptoms vary and include conjunctivitis, upper and lower respiratory infection, and gastrointestinal symptoms. Notably, conjunctivitis appears to be a prominent symptom. Dairy cattle in New Mexico, as well as cattle in Texas, Kansas, Michigan, and Idaho tested positive for this virus beginning in March 2024. Texas reported their first human HPAI A(H5N1) case on April 1 in a patient who became ill following contact with dairy cows presumed to be infected with avian influenza. There are no confirmed human cases in New Mexico at this time. There have been anecdotal reports of people with compatible symptoms after contact with infected cattle in New Mexico.

**Recommendations for Clinicians:**

Who should be tested for HPAI (A)H5N1?

Clinicians should consider testing for HPAI A(H5N1) in patients with clinically compatible symptoms who have had contact with animals or people with suspected or confirmed HPAI A(H5N1) in the previous 10 days. Possible symptoms vary and include conjunctivitis, upper and lower respiratory infection, and gastrointestinal symptoms. Notably, conjunctivitis appears to be a prominent symptom, and was the only symptom reported in the individual from Texas with confirmed infection.

The symptoms in livestock and other animals can be vague and confirmatory testing may be delayed, so testing should be considered for anyone who reports contact with ill cattle, birds, or other animals believed to be infected with HPAI A(H5N1). Testing asymptomatic individuals is not recommended. HPAI is a notifiable condition, and providers must call the NMDOH at 1-833-796-8773 to inform them of suspect cases and confirm that your patient meets the exposure and symptom criteria for testing.

Personal Protective Equipment when seeing patients with potential HPAI A(H5N1) infection includes a eye protection, gloves, a NIOSH-Approved particulate respirator (e.g., N95<sup>®</sup> filtering facepiece respirator, ideally fit-tested), and disposable gown.

CDC also has [recommendations for clinicians](#) on monitoring, testing, and antiviral treatment for patients with suspected or confirmed avian influenza A virus infections.

What specimens should be collected?

The CDC has provided detailed [guidance](#) on testing and specimen collection for suspected HPAI (A)H5N1 cases (symptomatic persons with potential exposure). An important change from routine influenza testing is that conjunctival swabs should be collected from these suspect patients who present with conjunctivitis.

**PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION**

The following specimens should be collected:

- A nasopharyngeal swab, **AND**
- A nasal swab combined with an oropharyngeal swab (e.g., two swabs combined into one viral transport media vial). If combined specimens cannot be collected, a single nasal or oropharyngeal swab is acceptable. **AND**
- **If the person has conjunctivitis (with or without respiratory symptoms), a conjunctival swab.**

Patients with severe respiratory disease also should have lower respiratory tract specimens (e.g., an endotracheal aspirate or bronchoalveolar lavage fluid) collected, and should be referred to ER for evaluation and testing.

Swab specimens should be collected using swabs with a synthetic tip (e.g., polyester or Dacron®) and an aluminum or plastic shaft. Swabs with cotton tips and wooden shafts are not recommended. Specimens collected with swabs made of calcium alginate are not acceptable. The swab specimen collection vials should contain 1-3 ml of sterile viral transport medium (e.g., containing protein stabilizer, antibiotics to discourage bacterial and fungal growth, and buffer solution).

Specimens must be delivered to the State Laboratory Division within 72 hours, and preferably within 24 hours. Contact 1-833-796-8773 for assistance coordinating delivery of the specimens.

### Treatment

Immediate treatment with oseltamivir (Tamiflu) is recommended for all patients potentially infected with HPAI A(H5N1) without waiting for testing results. Prophylaxis for all household contacts using the treatment dose is also recommended.

### What your patients should know:

- The risk to the general public is low.
- The commercial milk supply is safe; milk from ill cattle is diverted, and pasteurization kills influenza viruses. Raw milk does not undergo pasteurization and the risk of virus transmission through raw milk is unknown at this time.
- [Personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) should be worn when in direct or close contact (within about six feet) with sick or dead animals including cattle, poultry, wild birds, backyard bird flocks, or other animals, animal feces, litter, or materials potentially contaminated with HPAI A(H5N1) viruses. PPE includes a properly fitted unvented or indirectly vented safety goggles, disposable gloves, boots or boot covers, a NIOSH-Approved particulate respirator (e.g., N95® filtering facepiece respirator, ideally fit-tested), disposable fluid-resistant coveralls, and disposable head cover or hair cover.
- Seasonal influenza vaccination does not protect against HPAI A(H5N1). However, patients may still benefit from seasonal influenza or COVID-19 vaccination at this time.

Call the NMDOH Helpline at 1-833-796-8773 with any questions.

### **Additional Resources:**

[Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Virus in Animals: Interim Recommendations for Prevention, Monitoring, and Public Health Investigations | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Brief Summary for Clinicians: Evaluating and Managing Patients Exposed to Birds Infected with Avian Influenza A Viruses of Public Health Concern | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

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**New Mexico Health Alert Network:** To register for the NM Health Alert Network, please visit the following site <https://nm.readyop.com/fs/4cjZ/10b2> Please fill out the registration form completely and click Submit at the bottom of the page, to begin receiving Important health alerts, advisories, and updates.

**Please Note** that our system also utilizes text messaging to notify members of important health information. Due to FCC Regulation changes that are designed to decrease the amount of unwanted spam text messages sent each year to citizens, please save, this phone number **(855) 596-1810** as the **“New Mexico Health Alert Network”** default phone number for your account used for text messages on the mobile device(s) you register with us.