
NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT
Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza identified in New Mexico

April 15, 2024

Background:

The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) is urging veterinarians to consider infection with highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) in animals, especially cats, who could have had recent contact with other animals with suspected or confirmed HPAI A(H5N1). Dairy cattle and a cat in Curry County, New Mexico, as well as cattle in Texas, Kansas, Michigan, Idaho, Ohio, North Carolina, and South Dakota tested positive for this virus beginning in March 2024. Veterinarians should include HPAI A(H5N1) on their differential, especially in eastern New Mexico, and collect and submit specimens for testing to New Mexico Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS).

Texas reported their first human HPAI A(H5N1) case on April 1 in a patient who became ill following direct contact with dairy cows presumed to be infected with avian influenza. There are no confirmed human cases in New Mexico at this time. NMDOH believes the risk to the general public is low, but people with direct contact with animals suspected or confirmed to be infected with HPAI A(H5N1) should be aware of the potential risk of zoonotic transmission.

Recommendations for Veterinarians:

When should you test for HPAI A(H5N1)?

Veterinarians should consider testing for HPAI A(H5N1) in animals who may have been exposed recently to other animals with suspected or confirmed HPAI A(H5N1). Currently, the most likely exposures include infected wildlife or dairy cattle in herds suspected or confirmed to be affected with the virus. As of 4/15/2024, affected dairy cattle in New Mexico have been identified only in Curry County. Felids are known to be relatively susceptible to HPAI A(H5N1); a high index of suspicion should be given to barn cats on dairy farms with compatible clinical signs. Information is still being gathered, but neurologic signs including but not limited to ataxia, seizures, and stupor, ocular or nasal discharge, and rapid progression to death are known to be associated with HPAI A(H5N1) infections in animals. Rabies should always be considered in animals presenting with neurologic signs.

How do you test for HPAI A(H5N1)?

[New Mexico Veterinary Diagnostic Services](#) has the capability to test for HPAI A(H5N1). The preferred specimen for testing in mammals is the brain. Guidance for antemortem testing has not been developed at this time. Animals presenting with neurologic signs should also be tested for rabies; negative specimens can then be tested for HPAI A(H5N1).

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for HPAI A(H5N1) approved for use in animals.

When working with animals suspected to have HPAI A(H5N1)

Recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) when seeing patients with potential HPAI A(H5N1) infection includes eye protection, gloves, a NIOSH-Approved particulate respirator (e.g., N95® filtering facepiece respirator, ideally fit-tested), and disposable gown.

People exposed to animals with confirmed or suspected HPAI A(H5N1) virus infection should monitor themselves for any signs and symptoms of illness for 10 days after the last known or suspected exposure. This includes people wearing recommended personal protective equipment (PPE). If you develop compatible symptoms, including conjunctivitis, cough, sore throat, fever, runny nose, fatigue, body aches, shortness of breath, or gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhea, you should contact your healthcare provider immediately and inform NMHealth at 1-833-796-8773.

What your clients should know:

- The risk to the general public is low.
- The commercial pasteurized milk supply is safe; milk from ill cattle is diverted, and pasteurization kills influenza viruses.
- Raw milk does not undergo pasteurization and virus has been detected in the milk of infected cows.
- [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.
- Commonly available rapid influenza antigen tests do NOT reliably detect HPAI A(H5N1). When testing for HPAI A(H5N1), healthcare providers should send the recommended specimen types to the New Mexico Department of Health Scientific Laboratory. CDC also has [recommendations for clinicians](#) on monitoring, testing, and antiviral treatment for patients with suspected or confirmed HPAI A(H5N1).

Additional Resources:

[Current H5N1 Bird Flu Situation in Mammals](#)

[Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Detections in Livestock](#)

[APHIS Recommendations for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) H5N1 Virus in Livestock for State Animal Health Officials, Accredited Veterinarians and Producers](#)

[CDC Health Alert Network \(HAN\) | Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Virus](#)

[NM HEALTH ALERT NETWORK \(HAN\) ALERT: HPAI identified in New Mexico Cattle and Texas Resident](#)

[Backyard Flock Owners: Take Steps to Protect Yourself from Avian Influenza \(Bird Flu\)](#)

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

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.