



Australian Government

H5 bird flu information: traditional hunting and harvesting

September 2026

This information has been developed to help inform local messaging, it can be adapted for use in your state or territory.

If you see sick or dead birds or other animals, do not touch them.

Avoid contact.

Record what you see.

Report multiple sick or dead birds or other animals to the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888** from anywhere in Australia.

You can also report sick or dead birds to Elders, local community or ranger groups.

Working together helps protect our communities and Country and supports our wildlife.

- Talk with Elders, rangers and community leaders about ways to keep H5 bird flu out of the community.
- Work together to identify risks and reduce the impacts on poultry and other birds.
- Share information with family and community members about the signs of H5 bird flu.
- Let local community leaders, local council, environmental health workers, rangers or other trusted local contacts know if you see sick or dead birds.

Staying informed and sharing information helps protect communities and Country and supports our wildlife.

Can traditional hunting continue if H5 bird flu is present?

Traditional hunting is gathering food from the land according to First Nations traditions and cultural practices.

There are currently no restrictions on traditional hunting. However, local restrictions may be introduced if the disease risk increases in an area. Communities should follow advice from local authorities.

Is it safe to hunt healthy-looking birds?

If birds appear healthy, normal hunting activities can continue unless local restrictions are in place. Hunters should look out for signs of sickness and avoid harvesting birds that appear sick, injured, weak or disoriented, that are behaving unusually, or if you don't know how an animal has died.



What should I do if I find a sick bird or lots of dead birds or other animals while hunting?

Do not touch, collect or move sick or dead animals and do not hunt or harvest other animals in the area.

- **Avoid** sick or dead birds or other animals.
- **Record** your location.
- **Report** what you see to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on **1800 675 888**.

Your report can help protect communities and Country and support our wildlife.

What signs of H5 bird flu should hunters look for?

Animals may show signs that could include:

- unable to stand, walk or fly properly
- droopy, weak or puffed-up appearance
- breathing difficulties
- unusual head or neck positions
- groups of dead birds or other animals.

Can people catch H5 bird flu from hunting?

The risk to people is low but people who hunt birds or other animals, collect eggs, handle wildlife, or come into contact with sick or dead birds should be extra careful. Hunters can reduce their risk of infection by:

- avoiding contact with sick or dead animals
- reporting unusual bird or animal deaths
- following local biosecurity advice e.g. steps that help stop the disease spreading
- washing hands and cleaning equipment
- keeping dogs and cats away from or eating sick or dead animals

- sharing trusted information with community members
- getting an annual flu vaccination to help reduce the risk of getting H5 bird flu and seasonal flu at the same time.

Is it safe to eat collected eggs or hunted birds?

Bird meat and eggs are safe to eat when harvested or collected from healthy animals and cooked properly.

Meat and eggs should be cooked thoroughly all the way through (no blood in cooked meat). Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands and utensils before and after handling animals, eggs or raw meat. Use different knives and boards for raw meat and cooked food.

People should never eat animals that appear sick, were found dead or that were harvested in an area with sick or dead birds or animals.

Can H5 bird flu spread through feathers?

Yes. Feathers from infected birds can spread the virus. Avoid collecting feathers from sick or dead birds and wash hands after handling feathers from healthy harvested birds.

Can ceremonial feather collection continue?

Ceremonial feather collection may continue where it is safe and permitted. Feathers should not be collected from sick or dead birds or in areas where sick or dead birds and other animals have been found.

Local restrictions may be introduced if the disease risk increases in an area. Communities should follow advice from local authorities.



Are there any impacts to culturally important species like magpie geese and muttonbirds?

H5 bird flu may impact animals that are culturally important to First Nations communities, including waterbirds, seabirds and species used for food, ceremony and cultural practice such as muttonbirds and magpie geese. The impact on Australian wildlife is difficult to predict.

People should never eat animals that appear sick, were found dead or that were harvested in an area with sick or dead birds or animals.

Can fish, turtles and turtle eggs, dugongs and snakes get infected?

There have been no cases overseas of fish, turtles, turtle eggs and snakes being affected by H5 bird flu.

Dugong may be impacted by the disease, which has already affected seals and dolphins in Australia.

Follow safe food preparation and handling practices for these animals and their eggs.

What alternative food options are available?

Food systems differ across Countries and communities.

Communities can work with state and territory biosecurity, wildlife and land management agencies, alongside Traditional Owners and ranger groups, to understand local impacts and make decisions about sustainable harvesting and access to traditional foods.

State and territory governments play an important role in supporting communities during wildlife disease events. State and territory agencies lead the on-the-ground response to H5 bird flu, including wildlife surveillance, disease monitoring, biosecurity and management advice for affected areas.

Can dogs and cats get infected with H5 bird flu?

Although uncommon, dogs and cats can become infected after contact with sick or dead birds or by eating infected animals.

Keep pets away from sick or dead animals. Keep dogs on a leash, especially near wildlife, and cats contained.

Signs of H5 bird flu in dogs and cats can include:

- fever
- lethargy
- decreased appetite
- reddened or inflamed eyes
- discharge from eyes and nose
- coughing or sneezing
- difficulty breathing
- tremors, seizures, loss of balance, or blindness.

Could H5 bird flu affect access to hunting areas?

In some situations, disease control activities may temporarily restrict access to certain areas. These measures help reduce disease spread and protect wildlife, communities and cultural values. Any restrictions will be communicated by state and territory governments.

How can hunters help protect Country?

Hunters play an important role by:

- watching for signs of disease
- reporting sick or dead animals
- sharing information with family and community
- avoiding contact with sick or dead wildlife
- following biosecurity advice
- supporting the protection of culturally significant species and places.



What to do if you had contact with sick or dead birds or other animals

If you have handled a sick or dead bird or animal, their eggs, droppings, feathers, or body fluids:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Monitor yourself for symptoms for 10 days.
- Call a healthcare professional (e.g. GP, nurse, Aboriginal health worker) if you develop:
 - fever
 - cough
 - sore throat
 - runny nose
 - trouble breathing
 - conjunctivitis (red eyes) with itching, watering or discomfort.

If you are concerned about the health of your pet, contact a veterinarian for advice.

First Nations information and support

We acknowledge that the threat of H5 bird flu can be concerning for First Nations communities, as it may impact totems, culturally significant animals, and the health of Country.

If you're feeling worried, talk to someone you trust, like a health worker, ranger or community leader. Looking after each other and Country is something we can do together.

[13YARN](https://13yarn.org.au) (13 92 76) is a culturally safe, free and confidential support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Community members who are feeling distressed, worried or overwhelmed are encouraged to call **13 92 76** at any time, day or night.

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Contact the Department at NBCEN@aff.gov.au



Find out more

Information and resources about H5 bird flu are available at **birdflu.gov.au**.

**Emergency Animal
Disease hotline:**

1800 675 888