



Preparing for H5 avian influenza (bird flu)

Advice for landcare, environment, conservation and natural resource management (NRM) organisations

A serious strain of bird flu has been spreading in birds and mammals overseas. While H5 bird flu hasn't been found in Australia yet, we all have a part to play to ensure Australia is well prepared for a potential outbreak.

Landcare, environment, NRM and conservation groups play an important role in protecting diversity, restoring native habitats, managing natural areas, raising environmental awareness and supporting biosecurity efforts. Stay alert for signs of H5 bird flu in wild birds and mammals and know how to respond if you suspect a case.

Workplace health and safety requirements should be followed when considering advice in this factsheet.

What is H5 bird flu?

H5 bird flu is a serious and highly contagious strain of bird flu that has moved quickly around the world. Australia is currently the only continent free from this strain.

Wild, farmed and pet birds can all catch bird flu.

Unlike previous strains, overseas H5 bird flu has infected more than 500 wild bird species and more than 80 mammalian species. These were mainly marine mammals and bird-eating scavengers, but cases have also been detected in dairy cattle, cats, goats, alpacas and pigs.

Migratory wild birds can carry bird flu long distances, making them a potential pathway for H5 bird flu to enter Australia.

How it spreads

H5 bird flu spreads between animals via infected droppings, contaminated environments and close contact.

Human infections are rare and typically occur after close contact with infected animals or contaminated environments. If a person is displaying influenza-like symptoms after coming into contact with infected birds, they should seek advice from their doctor.

While the risk to people in Australia is low, it's still important to avoid contact with sick or dead birds and animals.



Responding to an outbreak

Australia has well-established national response arrangements in place to respond to emergency animal diseases, including bird flu.

If Australia experiences an H5 bird flu outbreak, there will be a rapid and coordinated national response led by the Australian Government, with state and territory governments leading response activities within their borders.

The Australian Government is working closely with state and territory governments, industry, non-government organisations, communities and businesses to prepare for a potential outbreak. Early detection and working together is important.

What environment organisations and groups can do to prepare

You can help prepare for an outbreak of H5 bird flu in many ways, including:

- ◆ **Employee awareness:** Ensure staff, volunteers and contractors are aware of the current situation, what to look for and how to report.
- ◆ **Activity/project planning:** Ensure biosecurity measures are in place for events that involve birds, such as on-ground conservation projects, wildlife releases, or community activities.
- ◆ **Site management:** Discourage wildlife feeding to minimise interactions between wildlife and humans. Consider and facilitate proper disposal of potentially infected materials such as carcasses and contaminated equipment to minimise potential spread.
- ◆ **Community awareness:** In collaboration with your state or territory government biosecurity and environment agencies, help educate residents, community partners, First Nations people, other organisations and the grantees/private landowners you work with about symptoms in wildlife and reporting processes for H5 bird flu.
- ◆ **Planning for an outbreak:** Engage early with your state or territory government contacts (or project manager) on planning and response strategies to ensure on-ground projects are well prepared and can continue effectively if an outbreak occurs. State/territory level response strategies will consider possible impacts to wildlife, commercial industries and people. First Nations communities may be uniquely impacted, particularly in relation to traditional hunting practices, culturally significant species and land use. Consider sites and species of importance to your local area and the role your organisation or group might play, as consistent with your state or territory's plans.

Signs to watch for in birds and mammals

Look for unusual behaviours and symptoms, such as:

- ◆ difficulty moving such as droopy wings, dragging legs and lying down
- ◆ unusual behaviour or posture - twisting of the neck, paralysis, staggering
- ◆ head or limb swelling
- ◆ tiredness/lethargy or reluctance to walk, eat or drink
- ◆ respiratory signs such as panting, nasal discharge or sneezing
- ◆ diarrhoea
- ◆ sudden death, or deaths of multiple birds.

What to do if you see sick birds or mammals

- ◆ Bird flu is serious and needs to be reported if you suspect it. **DO NOT** rescue, touch or move sick or dead birds or mammals with suspected bird flu.

We are asking the general public to:

- ◆ **Avoid** contact with sick or dead wildlife and their environment. Do not allow pets to touch or eat sick or dead wildlife.
- ◆ **Record** what you see, the location the animal was found, and take photos or a video.
- ◆ **Report** any multiple sick or dead animals to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Reporting will alert authorities to the event so they can evaluate the need for diagnostic testing or other investigation.

In collaboration with jurisdictions, industry and key conservation partners, the Australia Government is developing national guidance for carcass management should an outbreak occur. This guidance is intended to support jurisdictional governments to undertake risk management activities for sick and dead wildlife in environments where H5 bird flu is confirmed. This will be available through state and territory agencies and on birdflu.gov.au once finalised.

This advice will be updated should H5 bird flu be detected in Australia.

Key resources

For information on how your state or territory is preparing please visit the relevant government website.

For national updates and preparedness resources visit the Australian Government's website, birdflu.gov.au

Wildlife Health Australia's [H5 bird flu web page](#) also provides a range of resources to support surveillance, reporting, and response efforts for H5 bird flu.

The Communicable Disease Network Australia has developed [national guidelines](#) for protecting people who work with birds and wildlife from bird flu.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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