



Preparing for H5 avian influenza (bird flu)

Vaccination of priority native bird species

The Australian Government is actively working through regulatory and policy arrangements to enable the vaccination of Australian priority native bird species in the event of a H5 bird flu incursion (or significant threat of an incursion). Preparations include the purchase of a bird flu vaccine and vaccination trials.

Overview

While bird flu preparedness activities have been a national focus for many years, a highly contagious and serious strain, known commonly as H5 bird flu, has spread quickly across the world through the movement of wild birds. Overseas outbreaks have demonstrated that H5 bird flu could have significant impacts on our wildlife, agriculture industry and communities if it reaches Australia.

The Australian Government is preparing for a possible outbreak of H5 bird flu with a range of measures, including considering the vaccination of priority native bird species.

In February 2025, the Australian Government purchased an inactivated H5 bird flu vaccine from Zoetis, with a view to protecting priority non-poultry avian species – with a particular focus on threatened species. This vaccine has been used overseas to protect threatened bird species (free-ranging Californian condors).

Currently, the vaccine is only permitted for use by Australian Government agencies for research purposes, specifically for a vaccine trial being undertaken by CSIRO's Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP).

The purpose of the trial is to evaluate the safety and efficacy of this vaccine in small Australian bird species. This data has been requested by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) to inform an application for an emergency use permit for priority native species.

Australia's national Animal Health Committee (AHC) has endorsed a policy for the use of avian influenza vaccines for the protection of rare, protected and valuable avian species. Vaccination of priority native bird species could be considered in the event of an H5 bird flu outbreak, or if there is a significant threat of an incursion. Vaccination will primarily target threatened species held in captive breeding facilities. However, any decision to vaccinate such species is complex and depends on many factors.

In the meantime, the Australian Government continues to work with international governments to learn from overseas experiences in managing H5 bird flu, including the use of vaccines in threatened bird populations.

This fact sheet does not relate to the vaccination of poultry.

Frequently asked questions

Is a H5 bird flu vaccine available now for use in priority native bird populations?

- ◆ The vaccine is not yet available for use in priority native bird populations in Australia.
- ◆ Trials will first be undertaken by CSIRO-ACDP to ensure that the vaccine can be safely used in smaller native birds.

What is the purpose of the vaccine trial?

- ◆ The APVMA has requested the trial to gather safety and efficacy data for smaller native bird species (weighing <150 g).
- ◆ The data from this trial will inform the APVMA's consideration, approval, and issuance of an 'emergency use' permit for the vaccination of native birds, if required.
- ◆ Birds will not be exposed to H5 bird flu during the trial.

Which species are being tested as part of the trial?

- ◆ The trial will use 2 different captive-bred native bird species. These species will likely include a small parrot species, and a small passerine species.
- ◆ The trial will not be conducted on threatened species.

Is the trial underway?

- ◆ The trial is expected to commence in May 2025 following approval from an animal ethics committee.

How long will the trial take?

- ◆ The trial will be conducted in 2 phases.
- ◆ The first phase is focused on understanding the safety of the vaccine in small birds with results expected in August 2025.
- ◆ The second phase is focused on gathering longer term data to better understand the immune response of different bird species to the vaccine. This phase of the trial will also establish whether boosters are required after the primary vaccination course. Initial results are expected in late 2025.

What is the policy for the vaccination of priority native bird species?

- ◆ The [Avian Influenza Vaccination Policy for Rare, Protected and Valuable Avian Species](#) has been approved by the AHC, which comprises chief veterinary officers of the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments, and a representative from ACDP and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF).
- ◆ The policy was developed by a national expert advisory group, in consultation with technical experts, Wildlife Health Australia, the Zoo and Aquarium Association, DAFF and the Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW).
- ◆ The policy provides guidance on vaccination in the event of an incursion or a significant threat of incursion of a strain known to be a high risk to priority native bird species, particularly threatened species.

Which priority native bird species will be vaccinated?

- ◆ Any decision to vaccinate native bird species would be made with appropriate Commonwealth and jurisdictional authorisation and will be informed by available science and evidence.
- ◆ A H5 bird flu susceptibility analysis for all native bird species undertaken by DCCEEW will help inform any decision to vaccinate threatened bird species.
- ◆ Priority native bird species include species listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and other native bird species that are likely to be at high risk of H5 bird flu.

What are the arrangements for accessing and applying for the vaccine?

- ◆ The decision and authority to use vaccination is outlined in the [Avian Influenza Vaccination Policy for Rare, Protected and Valuable Avian Species](#). Approval is required by the relevant Chief Veterinary Officer.
- ◆ The importation and use of the vaccine are governed by the conditions of the import permit, and the permit requirements of the APVMA respectively.
- ◆ Current approvals permit the use of the vaccine by Australian Government agencies to conduct vaccine safety and efficacy trials.
- ◆ The avian influenza vaccine is not currently available for commercial, personal or widespread use.

What happens if there is an outbreak before the trial is finished?

- ◆ Australia has well-established national response arrangements in place to respond to emergency animal diseases, including bird flu. There will be a rapid and coordinated national response with state and territory governments leading response activities.
- ◆ Australian Government agencies will consider the best available science to make decisions about potential vaccination of priority native bird species.
- ◆ The APVMA can assess an application for an emergency use permit and advise the conditions under which the vaccine can be used, based on the information available at the time.

Is there a vaccine to protect mammals?

- ◆ There are currently no H5 bird flu vaccines authorised for use in mammal species.

Will wild birds, such as black swans, be vaccinated?

- ◆ The broadscale vaccination of birds in the wild is not considered appropriate, feasible or practicable.
- ◆ However, the vaccination of wild birds at high risk of extinction in nature in very specific situations, such as highly imperilled species limited to just one site, is being considered.
- ◆ This is being informed by a H5 bird flu species susceptibility analysis undertaken by DCCEEW.

Are there any complications caused by vaccinating threatened bird species against H5 bird flu?

- ◆ The vaccine being used in the trials is considered low risk for use in larger birds.
- ◆ However, all vaccines can potentially lead to side effects and adverse reactions, which may vary between bird species. The effectiveness and duration of an immune response may also vary between species.
- ◆ The vaccine trial will provide further information to understand the effects of the vaccine, and the duration of the immune response in smaller Australian bird species.

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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