



MEDIA REQUESTS:
Janenne Irene Pung, PIO
231-547-7653
Media@nwhealth.org
www.nwhealth.org

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Health Department of Northwest Michigan

**Highly pathogenic avian influenza discovered in Northwest Michigan
*Poultry owners and caretakers advised to tighten prevention efforts***

Cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), commonly known as bird flu, have been confirmed in Antrim and Otsego counties. No human illness has been associated with this detection. The Health Department of Northwest Michigan (HDNW) is sharing this information to recommend precautions for people who own or work with birds, including poultry, or hunt wild birds. HPAI in birds is not a food safety concern if poultry and eggs are handled and cooked properly.

Following an investigation by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), HDNW was notified that HPAI was detected in a Hooded Merganser in Antrim County and a Barred Owl in Otsego County. MDARD is working with poultry owners to mitigate the spread and provide outreach and support.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined these HPAI detections do not present a major, immediate public health concern. However, recently in Colorado, one person tested positive for bird flu after working to depopulate poultry infected with HPAI. This highlights the fact that people who have job-related or recreational exposures to infected birds are at higher risk of infection and should take appropriate precautions [outlined by the CDC](#).

"It is important that individuals working closely with and handling birds, whether infected or healthy, be cautious and maintain an awareness of the situation that has been evolving around the state," said Dr. Meyerson, medical director for the Health Department of Northwest Michigan. "Avian flu can spread when infected birds are not properly handled, and poultry owners or caretakers have not followed the necessary protocols."

HPAI is a form of influenza that is very contagious among birds and can spread in various ways from flock to flock, including by wild birds, through contact with infected poultry, by equipment, and on the clothing and shoes of caretakers.

Watch the flock

Poultry owners and caretakers are encouraged to watch for signs of avian influenza in their flocks. This includes unusual deaths, a drop in egg production, a significant decrease in water consumption, or an increase in sick birds. If avian influenza is suspected, they are urged to contact MDARD immediately at 800-292-3939 (daytime) or 517-373-0440 (after-hours). Doing so is not only important for the poultry, but to ensure the owner's health and safety.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For more information, visit nwhealth.org.

“The most important prevention step for non-commercial keepers of chickens is to keep the chickens and their feed contained in the coops until this increase in avian influenza passes,” said Jeremy Fruk, HDNW Director of Environmental Health Services.

Public health

According to the CDC, the public health risk associated with this avian influenza detection remains low. HPAI spreads easily among birds and – while rare – can spread from birds to people. MDARD advises the following precautionary steps be taken to protect both animal and human health:

- Prevent contact between domestic and wild birds by bringing them indoors or ensuring their outdoor area is fully enclosed.
- Wash your hands before and after handling birds as well as when moving between different coops.
- Disinfect boots and other gear when moving between coops.
- Do not share equipment or other supplies between coops or other farms.
- Clean and disinfect equipment and other supplies between uses. If it cannot be disinfected, discard it.
- Use well or municipal water as drinking water for birds.
- Keep poultry feed secure to ensure there is no contact between the feed/feed ingredients and wild birds or rodents.

Bird feeders

Also, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recommends the [temporary removal of bird feeders](#) this year to help curtail the spread of HPAI in both wild and domestic birds. If people continue to use bird feeders, please keep this guidance in mind:

- Thoroughly clean bird feeders with a diluted bleach solution (and rinse well) once per week. Regularly cleaning helps protect birds against other infections, including salmonella.
- Clean up birdseed that has fallen below the feeders to discourage large numbers of birds and other wildlife from congregating in a concentrated area.
- Don't feed wild birds, especially waterfowl, near domestic flocks.

To stay up to date, subscribe to receive email notifications by visiting MDARD's website and clicking on the "Avian Influenza" link. After entering a valid email address, subscribers will receive updates and alerts regarding the status of avian influenza in Michigan whenever there are new developments to report. Additional resources and information can be found here: <https://www.michigan.gov/birdflu>.

More information on avian influenza and how to protect can be found on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's website here: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-diseaseinformation/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-2022/2022-hpai-commercial-backyard-flocks>.

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