

FACTSHEET

Avian Bird Flu – H5N1 Strain



Have we seen cases of bird flu yet in Australia?

We have had different forms of bird flu within Australia but only 8 incursions since 1976, this has been isolated within poultry farms. And in all cases, we were able to contain and eradicate the virus.

What's the difference with various strains and why is H5N1-2.3.4.4b potentially worse than those expected to date?

We have not seen this form of avian influenza in Australia. Other strains have been seen in e.g. migratory swans. This strain can affect every type of bird and the virus has mutated and can infect scavenger animals and other mammals.

There are reports in the news of the bird flu impacting seals and sea lions, is that likely to happen in Australia? What could happen to all our native animals?

It could happen however there has been a lot of work put in place by high level organisations and conservation experts to minimise this impact.

Does bird flu affect humans – can it be transmitted to humans? What about domestic animals?

So far, it needs a lot of contact for transmission to humans. There have been some cases internationally however so far these cases have been minimal and mostly mild conditions. Even so it's recommended to avoid dead birds. There is no risk of infection by eating cooked chicken or eggs.

How do I know if a bird has bird flu, and what strain it is?

Clinical signs can vary between bird species. However signs such as a lack of coordination, arched head, paralysis, seizures, tremors, conjunctivitis, nasal secretions, laboured breathing and unusual sudden death could suggest H5N1.

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Is there anything I can do to help?

AVOID

- Avoid contact with sick or dead wildlife and their environment.
- Do not allow pets to touch or eat sick or dead wildlife

RECORD

- Record what you see, including the wildlife, location and surrounding area, using video and photographs.

REPORT

- Report any unusual sickness or mass deaths of wild birds (more than five birds) to the emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

How are we preventing bird flu coming to Australia?

We can't prevent it from coming to Australia due to the migratory pathways of the birds moving. However there is an active taskforce, monitoring and performing constant surveillance. As well as watching the status overseas and noting where infected birds are able to fly to.

What is WIREs doing?

WIREs is working closely with government, and specialist groups in the sector such as Biosecurity, Wildlife Health Australia and the Taronga Wildlife Health Registry, to improve the potential outcomes for wildlife. Senior WIREs staff are also meeting with Government bodies to ensure preparedness for an outbreak. WIREs has been highly proactive within the sector to ensure preparedness in the event this virus does come to Australia and have put everything possible in-place to protect our precious wildlife.

The Biodiversity Council recently hosted a webinar about the situation which you can watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPD3PjoINzw>

More information about the situation is available here: https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/admin/uploads/Briefing_note_bird_flu_response_priorities_a3dbdd4012.pdf