



What you need to know about bird flu: Suggested talking points

- **Bird flu has been around awhile, but recent cases in cows and humans are more concerning.**
 - The H5N1 strain of bird flu was first identified [in domestic birds in China](#) in 1996 and infected humans for the first time in 1997.
 - In March of this year, the H5N1 bird flu was found in cows for the first time in the U.S., causing [an outbreak in dairy herds and cattle](#) across 12 states. Many wild and domestic animals infected with bird flu have died.
 - Since 2022, there have been four human cases of bird flu reported in the U.S. All four people who contracted bird flu had been in contact with infected animals in agricultural settings, and their symptoms were mild.
- **Since bird flu is spreading among dairy cows, for now it's best to avoid raw milk and raw cheeses like queso fresco or cotija.**
 - Pasteurized milk and cheese are safer because they are treated to kill bacteria and viruses.
 - Raw dairy products can still contain the virus and make you sick.
 - It's safe to eat chicken, turkey, and beef that is properly handled and cooked.
- **People who work with cows and on farms are at greater risk.**
 - If you're a farm worker, [wear protective gear](#) like a mask and gloves while working near animals.
 - Everyone should avoid unprotected contact with wild birds or sick farm animals.
- **Be on the lookout for [symptoms of bird flu](#), which can be mild or more severe and require hospitalization.**
 - If you are infected with bird flu, you may experience flu-like symptoms, including a sore throat, cough, eye redness, fever, runny nose, fatigue, muscle or joint pain, headache, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or seizures.
 - Some people may show no symptoms at all.
 - If you develop flu-like symptoms within 10 days of exposure to an infected or potentially infected animal, isolate and contact your doctor so you can [begin antiviral treatment](#) as soon as possible.
 - You should also contact your local health department so you can get tested and determine when your isolation period may end.



What you need to know about bird flu: Frequently asked questions

1. What is bird flu, and where is it spreading?

The H5N1 bird flu is a type of influenza virus that primarily affects birds and can cause severe illness and death in animals. The H5N1 strain of bird flu was first identified [in domestic birds in China](#) in 1996 and infected humans for the first time in 1997. Since then, human cases of bird flu have been rare.

In March of this year, H5N1 bird flu was found in cows for the first time in the U.S., causing [an outbreak in dairy herds and cattle](#) across 12 states.

Since 2022, there have been four human cases of bird flu reported in the U.S. All four people who contracted bird flu [had contact with sick animals](#) in agricultural settings. Their symptoms were mild, and they all fully recovered.

Sometimes bird flu symptoms are severe and may require hospitalization. Humans who contract bird flu may experience a sore throat, cough, eye redness, fever, runny nose, fatigue, muscle or joint pain, headache, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or seizures. Some people may show no symptoms at all.

2. How can I protect myself from H5N1 bird flu?

You can protect yourself from bird flu by avoiding contact with wild birds, unprotected contact with domestic animals that may be sick or have died, and surfaces that may be contaminated with animal saliva, mucus, or feces. If you're a farm worker, [wear a mask and gloves](#) while working near animals.

Get your seasonal flu vaccine if you haven't already. Although seasonal flu vaccines don't protect against H5N1 bird flu, the CDC says they can "reduce the risk of getting sick with human influenza viruses and thus the risk for seasonal and bird flu co-infection." Wash your hands frequently and wear a well-fitting mask in crowded settings.

Avoid raw milk and raw cheeses like queso fresco or cotija. Pasteurized milk and cheese are safer because they are treated to kill bacteria and viruses.

3. Is there a vaccine for bird flu?

According to the CDC, there are [two H5N1 bird flu vaccines](#) ready for distribution in case person-to-person transmission occurs. If these vaccines are needed, the FDA could approve them quickly, since they're made using the same manufacturing process that is used to create seasonal flu vaccines.