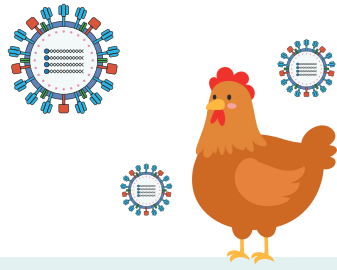


FACT SHEET: AVIAN INFLUENZA A H₅N₁ AI A (BIRD FLU)



What is H₅N₁ AI A?

H₅N₁ AI A is a rare, highly pathogenic avian influenza A virus that primarily affects birds but can also infect humans and other mammals, posing a significant public health risk.¹



How is H₅N₁ AI A spread?

- Direct & indirect exposure to infected live or dead poultry, contaminated environments like poultry farms, and live animal markets.² Recent outbreaks have occurred in domestic poultry, wild birds, and mammals such as dairy cows³
- Humans can become infected if the virus enters the eyes, nose, or mouth, or is inhaled from contaminated air or surfaces⁴
- There is limited evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission²

Who is at the highest risk?

Those working with poultry, livestock or wildlife are at a higher risk of being infected with H₅N₁ AI A, such as:

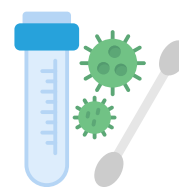
- Poultry workers
- Farmers
- Those hunting, de-feathering, or butchering wild birds or wild mammals
- Veterinarians
- Those who handle wild birds or mammals such as researchers or conservationists⁴

What are the signs & symptoms?

In humans, H₅N₁ AI A can cause a range of symptoms from mild to severe illness, including:

- Fever, cough, shortness of breath⁴
- Pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome⁴
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g. diarrhea)⁴
- Neurological complications (e.g. seizure)⁴

The incubation period ranges from 1 to 5 days (up to 9 days)⁴



How is H₅N₁ AI A diagnosed?

Diagnosis is commonly made by obtaining a nasopharyngeal swab within the first few days of illness⁴

Laboratory testing with RT-PCR and subtyping for the H₅ strain is required for accurate diagnosis of H₅N₁ AI A⁴

Is there a vaccine?

Seasonal influenza vaccines do not protect against H₅N₁ AI A⁴

There is **no commercially available vaccine for H₅N₁ AI A in Canada**, but candidate vaccine viruses exist⁴

What is the risk to Canadians?

Risk to the general Canadian population remains very low.⁴ Sporadic human infections from exposure to infected birds or livestock are possible²

What can be done to prevent & control H₅N₁ AI A?

- Basic preventive measures like hand hygiene, avoiding contact with infected birds or animals, and proper handling of poultry & meat products can reduce transmission risk^{2,3}
- Human cases of H₅N₁ AI A are notifiable under International Health Regulations, and confirmed/probable cases must be reported to PHAC within 24 hours^{2,4}

What has been Public Health Agency of Canada's response to H₅N₁ AI A?

- Surveillance of human cases and potential animal-to-human transmission events²
- Testing of exposed individuals and isolation of confirmed cases²
- Use of antivirals for treatment and prophylaxis as appropriate²
- Risk communication to high-risk groups like poultry workers, as well as the general public^{2,4}

References

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3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Avian Influenza Current Situation Summary [Internet]. 2024 May 28 [cited 2024 May 28]. Available from: [https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm\[1\]](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm[1])
4. Public Health Agency of Canada. Avian influenza A(H5N1): For health professionals. [Internet]. (2024, May 10). [cited 2024 May 28]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/avian-influenza-h5n1/health-professionals.html>

For more information on H₅N₁ AI A, scan the QR code below:



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