
SUBJECT: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1
Date: April 7, 2022
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To: Health Care Providers, Hospitals
From: Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health

- A strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza has been identified among poultry in WDG.
- The risk to the general public is considered to be low. However, individuals who have been exposed to infected poultry may require influenza testing and/or prophylaxis with oseltamivir (Tamiflu).
- If a symptomatic, exposed patient presents to your office, please contact WDGPH immediately at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 4752, after hours please call 1-877-884-8653

Over the past two weeks, a strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza (subtype H5N1) has been identified in multiple poultry farms across on Ontario.¹ WDGPH has been notified of two affected premises within the health unit and has been working with federal and provincial partners to ensure that appropriate control measures are implemented.

About H5N1 Avian Influenza

Avian influenza is caused by influenza viruses that primarily infect domestic poultry and wild birds such as geese, ducks, and shore birds. The H5N1 strain is considered a highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and is known to cause severe illness and death in birds.² In March 2022, the HPAI H5N1 was detected in Ontario poultry after having been identified in other parts of the world.

The HPAI H5N1 is distinct from the viruses that cause seasonal influenza. This strain is not easily transmitted from birds to human hosts and there has not been sustained human-to-human transmission. Human cases are generally among individuals who have had close contact with live or dead infected poultry (e.g. staff on poultry farms). The risk to the general public is considered low.

Since it is possible that the HPAI H5N1 virus could mutate into a more concerning strain, local public health units and other partners take steps to reduce the risk of zoonotic transmission.

For additional information, please refer to the Q&A from the Ministry of Health (attached with this advisory).

Actions for Health Care Providers

Individuals (e.g. farm staff) who have been exposed to an infected poultry flock are being advised to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of avian influenza for 14 days following their last exposure. Anyone who develops symptoms is asked to notify WDGPH and is also being directed to contact their health care provider.

Symptomatic, exposed individuals should be tested for avian influenza. If WDGPH is aware in advance, we will contact the individual's health care provider to discuss appropriate specimen collection and transportation. Testing for avian influenza requires authorization from the Public Health Laboratory prior to submission; WDGPH will arrange authorization and transportation to PHOL.

If you have a symptomatic, exposed patient presenting to your office and you have not already been contacted by WDGPH, please notify us immediately at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 4752; after hours please call 1-877-884-8653.

Testing is not recommended for exposed individuals who do not develop symptoms. However, individuals with significant, unprotected exposures may be recommended to receive oseltamivir (Tamiflu). In these scenarios, WDGPH will contact the individual's health care provider to make the necessary arrangements.

Seasonal Influenza Immunization

If individuals present to your office who have not yet had the seasonal influenza vaccine please offer this or direct them to WDGPH at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 4752 for an appointment.

Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC)

Continue to follow current screening and IPAC measures as indicated in the current MOH [COVID-19 Guidance: Primary Care Providers in a Community Setting](#). Patients with influenza symptoms should wear a well-fitting mask or respirator and be separated from other patients. Health care providers should wear a fit-tested N95 respiratory (or equivalent), gloves, isolation gown, and eye protection.³

References:

1. Government of Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) in Canada 2021-2022. Accessed: April 7, 2022. Available at: <https://inspection.canada.ca/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/diseases/reportable/avian-influenza/detection-of-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-h5n/eng/1640207916497/1640207916934>
2. Government of Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Fact Sheet - Avian Influenza. Accessed: April 7, 2022. Available at: <https://inspection.canada.ca/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/diseases/reportable/avian-influenza/fact-sheet/eng/1356193731667/1356193918453>
3. Ontario Ministry of Health. COVID-19 Guidance: Primary Care Providers in a Community Setting, February 14, 2022. Available at: https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_primary_care_guidance.pdf

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For more information, please contact:

Name/Title: Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health

Email: matthew.tenenbaum@wdgpublichealth.ca

Website: www.wdgpublichealth.ca