

Public Health Clinical alert

21 August 2026

Avian influenza

Key information

- H5 avian influenza has been detected in wild birds across Australia.
- The risk to human health in Australia [remains low](#). Human infection is rare and generally only occurs after close contact with infected birds or animals.
- **Consider avian influenza in patients with compatible symptoms who have had contact with dead or unwell birds or animals.** Call ACT Public Health on (02) 5124 9213 for advice on testing and isolation.
- Patients may experience mental health distress associated with animal deaths. Provide these patients with information to connect them with appropriate supports.
- **Continue to recommend annual seasonal influenza vaccination for all people aged 6 months and older.**

Background

- Avian influenza is caused by influenza A viruses.
- A strain of H5N1 avian influenza (2.3.4.4b) has spread globally in wild birds, poultry and some mammals since 2021. It was detected on mainland Australia for the first time in June 2026.
- Avian influenza is not easily transmissible from birds or animals to humans. Sustained human-to-human transmission has not been reported.
- Symptoms of avian influenza in humans are consistent with seasonal influenza and may include fever, cough, coryza, diarrhoea and nausea. Conjunctivitis appears to be a feature of this H5N1 strain.
- Symptoms usually appear between 1 and 10 days after exposure.
- Consider avian influenza in patients who present with influenza-like illness AND who have had contact with dead or unwell birds or animals in the 10 days before onset of symptoms.
- Other respiratory viruses are more likely to be the cause of illness, however additional actions relevant to a suspicion of avian influenza in humans are outlined below.

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If you suspect your patient has avian influenza

- If you suspect avian influenza, provide the patient with a surgical mask and isolate them in a single room with door closed. Use a negative pressure room, if available.
- Urgently notify ACT Public Health on (02) 5124 9213.
- Request an urgent nucleic acid test (NAT) for influenza, together with other respiratory viruses.
 - Include information on the request form regarding suspicion of avian influenza.
 - Standard influenza PCR tests will detect influenza A, however they do not differentiate avian influenza from seasonal influenza A.
 - Samples suspected of H5 avian influenza will need to be identified and prioritised for relevant additional testing.
- Clinical staff should use PPE to protect against contact and respiratory airborne transmission: long-sleeved fluid-resistant gown, gloves, eye protection and fit checked particulate filter respirator (PFR e.g. N95/P2).

Seasonal influenza vaccine

- Although the seasonal human influenza vaccine will not protect against H5N1 influenza, it reduces the risk of co-infection with seasonal influenza. Co-infection can lead to risk of viral reassortment, which may increase transmissibility to humans.
- All people aged 6 months and older are recommended to receive the seasonal influenza vaccine each year.

Resources

- [Bird flu \(avian influenza\) | Australian Centre for Disease Control](#)
- [ATAGI Statement on the administration of seasonal influenza vaccines in 2026](#)

Issued 21/08/2026 by:

Dr Sally Singleton, Deputy Chief Health Officer, Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD)