

There have recently been confirmed cases of Avian/Bird Flu in Plymouth County. H5N1, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) or “Bird Flu”, is a naturally occurring virus among wild aquatic birds, also known as wild waterfowl, throughout the world and can infect domestic poultry like chickens, ducks, and turkeys. Infected birds may or may not become sick but can infect other fowl.

The virus is shed through saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. It is often present in natural water sources frequented by wild waterfowl. Domestic poultry (backyard chickens and ducks) may become infected when natural water sources are frequented, and when in contact with wild waterfowl.

**Protective actions include:**

- Avoiding contact with suspected sick wild waterfowl and domestic poultry and observe them only from a distance.
- Keep domestic poultry (backyard chickens and ducks) away from wild waterfowl and natural water sources frequented by wild waterfowl.
- Dogs, cats, and other pets should be leashed and away from wildlife.

**If you find a dead bird** (wild waterfowl or domestic poultry), avoid contact. Contact your local animal control officer. Birds suspected of being infected should only be handled by professionals wearing appropriate protective gear.

Other types of birds, like songbirds and backyard birds, are rarely affected and should only be reported if there are 10 or more dead birds.

Symptoms in wild waterfowl and domestic poultry include sudden death without clinical signs, incoordination, diarrhea, lack of energy or appetite, decreased egg production, purple discoloration of wattles, comb and legs, nasal discharge, coughing, and sneezing.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, there is no evidence that anyone has been infected with avian flu by eating properly cooked eggs.

Avian Flu has also been detected in cattle. Milk from infected cattle is highly viral, but the virus is easily killed by the process of pasteurization. MA Wildlife and USDA Fish and Wildlife are conducting surveillance in wild bird populations and bulk milk tank testing in Massachusetts continues. To date, there is no evidence of infection in Massachusetts dairy cattle herds. The Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources is seeking to educate poultry owners about the risk this virus poses to their birds in hopes that owners will take precautions to prevent their flocks from exposure to the virus.