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KEY POINTS FOR MEDIA:

- Coordinated effort by state and local agencies, farms and trade groups protects dairy supply in Illinois
- IDPH reminds the public not to handle dead waterfowl during this migratory season, as they could be infected by H5N1
- The risk to the public remains low when appropriate precautions are taken

IDPH, Illinois Department of Agriculture Announce Illinois “Unaffected” by H5N1 Avian Influenza in Dairy Cattle

Agencies celebrate coordinated effort to protect dairy supply, remind public to remain vigilant

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) have announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) [has declared Illinois to be “unaffected” by H5N1 avian influenza](#), a recognition of the state’s efforts working with local health departments, dairy farms, and agricultural organizations to keep the illness from impacting the state’s dairy supply. The USDA defines “unaffected” as “Ongoing testing and surveillance activities demonstrate absence of disease in dairy cattle in the State.”

At the same time, the agencies are reminding the public that with migration season underway, infected wild birds may be found in Illinois, and stressed the need for appropriate precautions to prevent the spread of H5N1.

“Public health truly excels through the power of partnership,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “We, at IDPH, are grateful for our colleagues at the Illinois Department of Agriculture and at our local health departments, who worked with us to provide information, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other resources to protect dairy cattle and the people who work with them. We also appreciate the efforts of partners like the Illinois Farm Bureau and dairy farm operators who went the extra mile to keep our dairy supply safe. We look forward to continuing to work with our partners to keep our Illinois residents safe and protected.”

“Illinois farmers are on the front lines managing the safety of our food supply chain,” said Jerry Costello II, Director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture. “Our collaborative work across agencies and our commitment to take swift, science-based action has kept our dairy herds safe and our food supply secure to date. This designation by USDA reflects the vigilance and dedication of our farm families and the strength of our biosecurity efforts statewide.”

“Our priority is protecting the health of both farmers and their livestock,” said Brian Duncan, Illinois Farm Bureau President. “By working with state and local partners to provide PPE and guidance, we are helping dairy farmers take proactive steps to reduce risk and maintain confidence in their operations.”

H5N1, also known as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), is a contagious illness found in waterfowl and other birds. It can be transmitted to cattle or humans who come in contact with an infected bird. IDPH and IDOA began closely monitoring dairy operations for signs of H5N1 in the spring of 2024. The coordinated effort overseen by the agencies has included educational materials and provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to minimize the risk of infection and prevent the potential spread of the illness.

Director Vohra noted that we are heading into the time of year when migratory waterfowl, which could be infected with H5N1, are coming into Illinois. He reminds the public to take appropriate precautions to avoid the risk of infection through contact with infected birds. IDPH has [information on its website about what to do if you encounter dead bird carcasses on your property](#). In addition:

- Do not send dying or dead birds to veterinarians, wildlife refuges, etc., for testing. Instead, notify [your local health department](#) or alert [IDNR wildlife biologists](#) in cases of five or more dead birds found in one location.
- People can get on antiviral medications after exposures to prevent illness.
- If the public develops any symptoms of the “flu” – fever, cough, sore throat, difficulty breathing, body aches, headaches, eye redness, vomiting or diarrhea – after exposure to sick or dead birds, please notify the local health department immediately. Upon seeking medical attention, please let any health care facility know of your exposure.
- Treatment must be started within two days of illness for it to be most effective, so the public is urged to not delay seeking care.

While the risk of infection to the general public remains low, IDPH stresses that it is still important to take precautions to avoid exposure and spread of the virus.

More information on H5N1 avian influenza can be found on the IDPH website at [H5N1 Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#) and [H5N1 Toolkit](#).

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