

HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA AND PHARMACIST INFLUENZA TESTING

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) continues to monitor the outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A (H5N1) in poultry and dairy cattle that has resulted in a small number of human infections in parts of the country.

The current risk of H5N1 bird flu infections in the general public remains low. However, people with exposure to confirmed or potentially infected birds, cattle, or other animals (e.g., workers in dairies, slaughterhouses, and on poultry and cattle farms) are at higher risk and should take appropriate precautions.

Pharmacists play a pivotal role in population health management and are often the first point of contact for many individuals seeking medical advice. Pharmacists may also offer influenza testing services and should be aware of H5N1 and when to refer patients for further testing. Below are key actions you can take to help manage the risk of H5N1 in your communities:



Awareness and Education:

- ▶ Educate patients at high risk for infection about the signs and symptoms of H5N1, which include fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, and in severe cases, difficulty breathing and pneumonia.
- ▶ If a patient has been exposed to H5N1, instruct them to contact their [local health department](#) and watch for symptoms for 10 days after their last known exposure.
- ▶ Emphasize the importance of seeking medical attention right away if a patient develops symptoms of H5N1, for testing and possible treatment. They should stay home and away from others until they are able to do so.



Pharmacist Testing:

If you are offering respiratory illness testing services at your pharmacy, such as influenza, COVID-19, or Group A Streptococcus, screen patients for their risk of exposure to H5N1. If an individual is at high risk of exposure to H5N1 and is symptomatic, contact the local health department to arrange for testing for influenza (H5N1) virus through the state health department laboratory, the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS).



Preventative Measures:

Encourage good hygiene practices, such as regular handwashing, avoiding contact with sick birds or animals, and using protective equipment when necessary. Provide information on the availability and use of antiviral medications and vaccines for those at risk. Encourage and, when possible, provide seasonal flu vaccination to reduce the risk of getting sick from seasonal flu or becoming coinfecting with seasonal flu virus and bird flu.



Stay Informed:

Keep abreast of the latest updates and guidelines from the Virginia Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding H5N1. Ensure that your pharmacy is stocked with necessary supplies and information pamphlets to support patient education and safety. **Review the [CDC Emergency Use Instructions for Oseltamivir](#) as instructions for use vary from manufacturer instructions.**



For more information please visit vdh.virginia.gov/hpai

If you have any questions or need additional resources, please do not hesitate to contact your [local health department](#) or [visit vdh.virginia.gov](https://vdh.virginia.gov). Thank you for your continued commitment to public health and safety.