

Public Health Advisory

To:	Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora Healthcare sector contacts
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Title:	Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI or Avian Flu) update

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Update

Please share the following information with relevant staff in your organisation

Overview

Following a detection of cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza/HPAI (also commonly known as avian flu or bird flu) subtype H7N6 in [chickens on a poultry farm in Otago](#), this information provides an update on the disease, the health response underway, and guidance for clinicians.

The overall public health risk of avian influenza A (H7N6) to human health is very low and there are no suspected or confirmed human cases of the H7N6 influenza virus associated with this outbreak. There has never been a human case of H7N6 influenza virus reported to the World Health Organisation or in scientific literature globally. This is despite there having been significant outbreaks in poultry globally with many human exposures to sick birds.

Health response to this outbreak

Health NZ | Te Whatu Ora, the Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora and ESR are supporting the Ministry for Primary Industries and the Department of Conservation in the response to the avian cases of HPAI.

Exposed workers from the poultry farm have been identified and will be monitored by the NPHS Southern, the local public health service. All exposed persons will be provided with the attached information sheet. A clinical and technical advisory group have agreed that routine post-exposure antivirals are not recommended given the assessed risk level. However, after an individual risk assessment, discussion with clinical microbiology, infectious disease physicians and/or the Medical Officer of Health, antivirals may be warranted for specific circumstances.

The risk to the general public from this outbreak is extremely low. As stated in MPI media and public communications, there is no appreciable risk to food safety.

- The [communicable disease manual](#) provides guidance regarding public health management of avian influenza.
- Advice for the public regarding avian influenza (including health and safety guidance) is available [here](#)

When should HPAI be suspected?

HPAI is a notifiable disease, and any potential human cases should be notified on suspicion to the local public health service.

Consider HPAI in people with compatible symptoms **AND** the following epidemiological risk factors: Close contact or exposure (shared indoor airspace, or if outside, within 2 metres) with any of the following within 10 days prior to symptom onset.

- 1) Animals, animal fluids or faeces, or their environments suspected to be infected with avian influenza, including:

- Live, sick or dead domestic poultry or wild birds, including live bird markets, in an area affected by avian influenza.*
 - Any infected animal with confirmed avian influenza, or a high index of suspicion of avian influenza.
 - Environments contaminated with faeces or droppings, bodily fluids, unpasteurised (raw) milk or other unpasteurised dairy products, or animal parts (e.g. carcasses, internal organs) in an avian influenza affected area and species.*
 - Consuming raw or undercooked poultry or eggs from an area affected by avian influenza.*
- 2) Humans with suspected or confirmed avian influenza infection, or their clinical samples, including:
- A confirmed, probable or suspected human case of avian influenza
 - A human case(s) with severe unexplained respiratory illness, or severe illness of unknown aetiology resulting in death, who has been in an avian influenza affected area.*
 - Close contact with a human case in a healthcare setting, including directly providing care, touching a case, or being in close vicinity to an aerosol generating procedure during their infectious period.

*This area will be defined by MPI within the next 24-48hrs. For queries regarding affected area in the interim, please contact protection.clinical@tewhatuora.govt.nz

Symptoms of HPAI

HPAI symptoms can range in severity, from conjunctivitis or very mild coryzal or flu-like symptoms, to severe illness including pneumonia, respiratory failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome, multi-organ failure, sepsis, meningoencephalitis, and death.

If you suspect a case of HPAI in the community (GP) or in a hospital

- Isolate the patient and follow airborne and contact infection control precautions.
- Document their history of exposure to sick animals, particularly birds (including visiting poultry farms).
- Notify the local Medical Officer of Health on suspicion of a case.
- In conjunction with public health, seek infectious disease and microbiology advice regarding assessment, testing and treatment.
- Ensure diagnostic samples (e.g. nasopharyngeal swabs or aspirates) are taken for influenza PCR, noting HPAI risk factors on the laboratory form.
- Laboratories which identify influenza A positive samples from patients with suspected HPAI should arrange further sub-typing.
- Local public health teams should immediately notify the national protection clinical team on call and follow [CD manual guidance](#).

Further Information

Further information about avian flu is available here:

[Communicable Diseases Control Manual – Avian Influenza](#)

[Public Health Information - HPAI](#)

[Ministry for Primary Industries - HPAI](#)

[Department of Conservation - HPAI](#)

Contacts

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