



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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The Department of Livestock Asks Montanans to be Aware of Avian Influenza

Helena, Mont. – The Department of Livestock is asking Montana poultry and dairy owners to be aware of the risk of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) as the spring waterfowl migration gets underway. The virus continues to remain active across the country with 25 new detections in poultry flocks in 12 states over the last 7-day reporting period. Additionally, a Canada goose was confirmed infected in Gallatin County on February 26.

Avian influenza is an infectious viral disease of birds that can cause high mortality rates in domestic flocks. Sick birds can exhibit numerous signs such as swollen eyes, discolored comb and legs, or a significant drop in egg production or water and feed consumption. However, the most consistent presentation has been sudden death.

Migratory waterfowl are the primary source for avian influenza. Wild birds can carry the virus and appear healthy. The spread of HPAI from migratory birds to domestic poultry increases during the migration patterns in the spring and fall. The virus is shed in the feces, saliva, and respiratory secretions of infected birds.

Domestic poultry are infected through direct contact with infected wild birds or through contact with contaminated objects, equipment, or the environment. The best tool for minimizing the risk of exposure is enhanced biosecurity, including:

- Avoiding exposure to wild birds to the extent possible, including housing birds indoors and limiting wild bird access to poultry feed and water sources.
- Using dedicated clothing, boots, and equipment when caring for birds.
- Cleaning and disinfecting boots, equipment, and vehicles that enter areas where birds are housed.
- Limiting visitor access to areas where poultry and livestock are housed.
- Regularly checking animals for signs of illness and isolating sick animals as soon as possible.
- Avoid housing different species in close proximity to one another.

In addition to disease in poultry, Nevada and Arizona have had recent introductions of HPAI into dairy cattle from wild birds. Dairy cattle infected with HPAI tend to have less severe symptoms and can recover. Common signs may include a decrease in milk production, decreased appetite, fever, or loose feces. Cattle infected with HPAI can transmit the virus in their milk. The Department therefore recommends that raw milk from sick cows not be consumed. Pasteurization will inactivate the virus if present in milk.

Poultry and dairy producers should report sudden onset of compatible clinical signs or high death loss in domestic poultry to their local veterinarian or MDOL at (406/444-2976). If you find sick or dead wild birds that have died from unknown causes, please contact your local Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) office or the FWP wildlife veterinarian (406-577-7880).

HPAI is a potentially zoonotic disease with 70 human cases reported nationally associated with this outbreak. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) continues to consider the public health risk to the general population to be low, however, the risk is considered moderate to high for individuals in contact with potentially infected animals or environments. Public health officials recommend wearing gloves when handling sick or dead birds and washing hands thoroughly after contact with poultry.

HPAI is not a food safety concern. Existing safeguards to keep food, safe and wholesome, including pasteurization, are sufficient to protect people, and the food supply in the United States is one of the safest in the world. As a reminder, the US Department of Agriculture recommends cooking poultry to 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

The mission of the Montana Department of Livestock is to control and eradicate animal diseases, prevent the transmission of animal diseases to humans, and to protect the livestock industry from theft and predatory animals. For more information on the Montana Department of Livestock, visit www.liv.mt.gov.

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For more information on biosecurity, please visit the USDA website at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/defend-the-flock/resources>