

# What Workers Need to Know About Avian Influenza

Employers are responsible for ensuring a safe and healthy workplace for their employees. This includes protecting workers from the hazards posed by occupational exposure to avian flu. The following is an overview of some of the California Code of Regulations, Title 8, sections applicable to avian influenza prevention and exposure that employers must comply with. When avian influenza A(H5N1) is detected in poultry or in a dairy herd, provide and ensure that exposed employees wear N95 respirators, goggles or face shield, gloves, and other PPE needed for the task.

## Who is at Risk?

Workers who have job-related contact with birds or cows infected or possibly infected with the bird flu are at risk of becoming infected with bird flu. This includes workers at bird rehabilitation centers, bird and animal sanctuaries, poultry farms or dairy farms, slaughterhouse workers, laboratories that test samples for the virus, and responders during bird flu outbreaks in birds or other animals.

## How is Bird Flu Spread?

Diseases that can be spread from animals to humans are called zoonotic diseases. Workers can become infected with bird flu when they breathe in tiny particles containing the virus, called aerosols. They can also become infected when they touch a surface contaminated with the virus, then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. The risk of human infection from drinking raw milk containing live influenza A (H5N1) virus is unknown. High levels of the virus have been found in unpasteurized milk from infected cows. CDC and FDA continue to recommend against eating or drinking raw milk or raw milk products.

## What Are Employers Required to Do to Protect Workers?

As with other workplace health and safety hazards, your employer must protect workers from infection to bird flu. The primary Cal/OSHA regulation that applies is the Zoonotic Aerosol Transmissible Diseases regulation, title 8 [section 5199.1](#). Employers of workers

who work with or around birds and cows are required to address potential worker exposures to bird flu through a variety of protective measures.

- **Sanitation.** Employers are required to keep the work areas clean. Animal-related dusts may contain the virus, so the dust must be cleaned and kept from being kicked up into the air. Employers must also make sure handwashing facilities are kept in good condition and stocked with soap and paper towels. Do not eat or drink in areas where you work with animals.
- **Safe work practices.** When working with animals, wash your hands often and if needed, adjust how you work so that you do not put dust in the air. For example, wet down the area with water when cleaning bird droppings or animal pens.
- **Investigation** of work-related injuries and illnesses. If you start to feel symptoms that could be bird flu, report them to your employer. Your employer is required to send you for medical attention and investigate how you got sick.
- **Training.** Your employer is required to provide you with training on workplace hazards and their exposure control procedures, including how to use any personal protective equipment (PPE) they provide you.
- **Personal protective equipment (PPE) and clothing.** Depending on your work tasks, your employer may need to provide you with the following PPE:
  - Respiratory protection
  - Coveralls
  - Aprons
  - Gloves
  - Head coverings
  - Shoe covers
  - Eye protection
- If your worksite is under a quarantine order, movement restriction, or other infection control order, your employer must use additional protections.

## How Can You Protect Yourself?

You can protect yourself by wearing any PPE, protective clothing, and respirators your employer provides you. If you feel the protective equipment your employer provides is not enough, you are allowed to bring and wear your own respirator, at least an N95.

Also, use work practices that do not produce dust.

## What Should You Do if You Feel Sick?

If you start to feel flu like symptoms, report them to your supervisor. Your employer is required to send you to the doctor and investigate how you got sick.

## You Have Rights!

You have the right to a safe and healthy workplace, regardless of immigration status, and may file confidential complaints about workplace safety and health hazards with Cal/OSHA.

Workers with work-related questions or complaints may contact the Cal/OSHA Call Center in English or Spanish at 833-579-0927.

## Resources for Workers

- Cal/OSHA
  - [File a Complaint with Cal/OSHA](#)
  - [How to File a Complaint with Cal/OSHA](#)
  - [Cal/OSHA Outreach Services](#)
  - [Understand Your Workplace Safety and Health Rights](#)
- CDC Influenza (flu)
  - [H5N1 Bird Flu: What to do if you get sick](#)
  - [Protect Yourself from H5N1 When Working with Farm Animals](#)
  - [Updated Interim Recommendations for Worker Protection and Use of Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) to Reduce Exposure to Novel Influenza A Viruses Associated with Disease in Humans](#)
- California Department of Public Health
  - [Influenza in Animals](#)
    - Worker Protection for Bird Flu - [English](#) | [Spanish](#)
- UC Davis Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety
  - [Limiting Farmworker Exposure to Bird Flu](#)