

Animal Health Alert:
H5 bird flu suspected in two domestic cats
that tested Influenza A positive and consumed recalled raw milk.
12.12.2024

Key Points:

- Two indoor-only, domestic cats from the same household in Los Angeles (LA) County have tested positive for Influenza A virus and are suspected to be positive for H5 bird flu. These are the first suspected cases of H5 bird flu in cats in LA County.
- The cats consumed recalled raw milk sold for human consumption 8-14 days prior to presentation with clinical signs. The milk was produced by Raw Farm, LLC in California and is part of a broad, voluntary recall of raw milk products that were produced between November 9-27 due to possible H5 bird flu contamination.
- Pets, especially cats, have been shown to become severely ill and may die after consuming raw milk infected with H5 bird flu virus. Veterinarians should share information about the raw milk recall and remind pet owners not to consume raw dairy products nor offer them to pets.
- Veterinarians, veterinary staff, and animal health workers in LA County should wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when having contact with sick cats that have history of exposure to raw milk/milk products.
- Report suspected cases of H5 bird flu in cats and other animals.

Dear Veterinary Colleagues:

Influenza A virus has been detected in post-mortem samples collected from two domestic cats from the same household in Los Angeles County. These cats are suspected to be positive for H5 bird flu. The cats had reportedly consumed raw milk from Raw Farm, LLC, that has been recalled due to possible H5 bird flu contamination. Approximately 8-14 days later, they became severely ill. Both Influenza A positive cats presented to a veterinary hospital with lethargy, dehydration, anorexia, and had elevated liver enzymes. One of the cats presented with neurologic signs (nystagmus) and had icteric serum. The other cat presented with hypotension, visible icterus, and a fever. No neurologic signs were observed in this cat. Both cats were humanely euthanized ~3 days after initial clinical signs were observed. Samples collected from the cats post-mortem tested positive for influenza A at the LA County Department of Public Health, Public Health Laboratory. Necropsy and additional testing for one of the cats is in progress at the California Animal Health & Food Safety (CAHFS) laboratory.

Influenza A is rarely detected in cats. These are the first cats, and first mammals, in LA County to be presumed positive for H5 bird flu. These are also the first animals reported to have become ill after ingestion of recalled raw milk for H5 bird flu contamination. The only other cat

reported to be positive for Influenza A in LA County before now occurred in 2009, when a cat became mildly ill after being infected with the human pandemic H1N1 virus from its owner.

H5 bird flu is currently circulating in wild birds locally. There have been a total of 39 confirmed cases of H5 bird flu in wild birds detected in LA County since September 2022. Of these, six H5 bird flu cases were confirmed in wild birds in LA County in 2024. While primarily affecting poultry, H5 bird flu infections in cattle, cats, and other mammals highlight the potential for the virus to mutate and become more transmissible among mammals, including humans.

Currently, there is no evidence of local cat-to-cat, cat-to-human or human-to-human spread of H5 bird flu, and the risk to the general public continues to be low. However, people who come into close contact with animals, especially wild birds and their feces, infected poultry, or with infected dairy cattle or their milk, have a higher level of risk of exposure. It is important to take proper precautions. Please see [H5 bird flu infection prevention guidance for veterinary and animal care staff](#), as well as guidance for the general public on our [LA County Veterinary Public Health Program website](#).

There is a [broad, voluntary recall of all Raw Farm, LLC raw milk and cream products](#) due to possible H5 bird flu contamination that went into effect 12/3/24. The recall includes all sizes of Raw Farm milk and cream, produced between November 9 and November 27, 2024. The affected lot numbers are 20241109 through 20241127. While this voluntary recall only applies to raw whole milk and cream, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) urges consumers to avoid consuming any Raw Farm products for human consumption including raw milk, cream, cheese, and kefir, as well as raw milk pet food topper and pet food kefir marketed to pet owners.

Consumption of H5 bird flu-infected raw milk has been shown to cause severe illness and death in mammals, especially cats. There have been multiple reports of deaths in barn cats living at dairy farms with H5 bird flu outbreaks. Raw dairy products marketed for pets, including frozen raw dairy products, may be sold across state lines, and are regulated differently than raw dairy products for humans. **It is strongly recommended not to feed any raw dairy products to pets.** The CDC recommends against consuming raw milk contaminated with live H5 bird flu virus as a way to develop antibodies against the H5 bird flu virus to protect against future disease.

Pasteurization kills and inactivates the H5 bird flu virus, therefore pasteurized milk and dairy products remain safe to consume. However, freezing does not kill viruses and does not kill most bacteria. Frozen raw dairy products should be considered to carry the same level of risk for infectious disease exposure as refrigerated raw dairy products.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health requests your continued assistance:

- **Share information about the recall of raw milk and cream products with pet owners.** It is available [here](#).

- **Identify potential cases of H5 bird flu in pets.** Consider H5 bird flu in any pet that had exposure to recalled raw milk or wild birds, especially if they have fever, severe lethargy, icterus, hepatopathy, tachypnea, uveitis, or neurologic signs such as seizures, nystagmus, or blindness. Take a detailed diet history for each pet.
- **Report potential H5 bird flu cases.** Please use our [HPAI-specific reporting form](#) when notifying VPH of any suspected cases. Please also contact our Veterinarian on Call at 213-288-7060 and vet@ph.lacounty.gov. Free testing for influenza A virus and H5 bird flu may be available through our laboratory.

Veterinarians and animal health workers are encouraged to contact us with any questions by email: vet@ph.lacounty.gov, or by phone: 213-288-7060 (Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm). Please visit our [VPH webpage for more information about H5 bird flu](#).

Resources:

- LA County Department of Public Health News Release - [December 12, 2024: The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is investigating two possible cases of H5 bird flu in cats that consumed recalled raw milk from Raw Farm, LLC.](#)
- LA County Veterinary Public Health Program (VPH) - [H5 Bird Flu in Los Angeles County](#)
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH) - [State Secures Broad Voluntary Recall of Raw Milk and Cream to Protect Consumers](#)
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH) – [Current Bird Flu Situation](#)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – [Influenza in Animals](#)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – [H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation](#)
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA) – [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Detections in Mammals](#)

Sincerely,

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