

ANIMAL HEALTH ALERT

Veterinary Public Health | (213) 288-7060 | vet@ph.lacounty.gov | <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/>



Animal Health Alert: H5 Bird Flu confirmed in Los Angeles County in another domestic cat that consumed commercially available raw pet food

Key Points:

- Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) aka H5 bird flu, has again been confirmed in a local cat. This is the first reported case in a cat since the cluster (9 confirmed and 10 suspected cases) that were infected via raw milk, raw pet food, and raw meat in December 2024–January 2025.
- Two indoor-only cats from a single household became acutely ill and died after consuming commercially available raw pet food. One cat tested positive for H5N1 (clade 2.3.4.4b genotype B3.13). The second cat was not available for testing.
- Investigation into the raw food product consumed by these cats is ongoing with the FDA.
- H5 bird flu continues to circulate in the U.S.
- Always take dietary and exposure histories. Specifically note any feeding of **raw pet food, raw milk, raw meat, or food or treats that are freeze dried without cooking first**. Ask pet owners about pet access to and predation of wild birds.
- Isolate suspected cases of influenza in pets, wear appropriate **personal protective equipment (PPE)** and practice thorough **cleaning and disinfection**. There may be risk of transmission to other pets through direct transmission or contaminated fomites.
- **REPORT** suspected cases of H5 bird flu in cats and other animals in Los Angeles County to Veterinary Public Health. **Free testing** for influenza in a pet may be available. Criteria for free testing can be found below.

Dear Veterinary Colleagues:

Approximately 1-2 weeks after beginning to consume a batch of commercially available raw pet food purchased in Los Angeles County, one cat in a household of two strictly indoor-only cats became acutely ill. This cat had signs of inappetence followed by a rapid decline characterized by neurologic symptoms. The cat died several days after the initial signs of illness. About five days after the first cat became ill, the second cat showed signs of illness including a loss of appetite and fever that progressed to severe neurologic signs before this cat also died. This second cat was sampled for influenza A by PCR testing on swabs of the nares, oropharynx and rectum after its death. The samples were tested by the Los Angeles County Public Health Laboratory and all three were PCR-positive for influenza A. The sample was then confirmed positive for H5N1 avian influenza clade 2.3.4.4b genotype B3.13 on September 23, 2025, by the USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL). This is the genotype currently circulating in dairy cows and poultry in the U.S. The NVSL will also analyze the samples using whole genome sequencing (WGS).

The owner identified the raw food product that was fed to the cats and shared the packaging and lot code information. Investigation into the food is ongoing with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

LAC DPH is monitoring household members and veterinary clinic staff who had contact with the sick cats for flu symptoms and offering testing and treatment for persons with clinical signs. No human cases of H5 bird flu have been linked to this case to date, and the risk of virus transmission to people remains low.

Veterinary Public Health extends sincere condolences to the family of these cats. We sincerely appreciate the time and effort by the pet owners who provided information about their household pets, exposures and about the raw products their cats consumed. Reporting unusual occurrences of animal disease is critical to protecting the health of both animals and people in Los Angeles County.

H5 Bird Flu Situation

The H5 bird flu virus continues to cause a severe panzootic. Traditionally it primarily infects poultry and other birds, but it has also been detected in [livestock \(mainly dairy cattle\)](#) and other [wild and domestic mammals](#) in the U.S., as well as in at least [74 species of mammals worldwide](#). It continues to be detected in birds and mammals in multiple regions around the world including in both polar regions. This large range of infected animal species worldwide highlights the potential for the virus to mutate and become more transmissible among animals, including humans. To date there have been [70 confirmed human cases](#) in the U.S. including one death from H5 bird flu. **H5 bird flu is a One Health issue that significantly affects human health, animal health and environmental health. With this strong scientific evidence of the linkage between contaminated raw products and cats developing severe or fatal H5 bird flu infection, veterinarians should**

strongly advise pet owners to not consume nor feed raw dairy, raw meat, raw poultry, and raw pet food diets to pets.

Cat-to-cat transmission of H5 bird flu has been [demonstrated experimentally](#) and may occur in cats that are in close contact. A recently published case of [H5 Bird flu in an immunocompromised cat](#) may have been caused by fomites contaminated by another ill cat in a veterinary practice. The risk of cat-to-human or human-to-human spread of H5 bird flu, and the risk to the general public continues to be very low. However, people who come into close contact with animals, especially wild birds and their feces, infected cats, infected poultry, or infected dairy cattle or their milk, have a greater risk of exposure. It is important to take proper precautions, as described below.

Actions requested of animal health staff in Los Angeles County:

- **Advise pet owners that they should not consume or feed their pets raw dairy, raw meat, raw poultry, or raw pet food diets.** Share information about the [risks to both human and pet health when feeding raw diets](#).
- **Stay aware of recalls and share them with pet owners.** Both pet products and human grade products that are fed to pets may be recalled for H5 bird flu contamination or contamination with other pathogens such as *Salmonella* or *E. coli*:
 - [FDA Recalls, Market Withdrawals and Safety Alerts](#)
 - [FSIS Recalls and Public Health Alerts](#)
 - [California Department of Public Health – Food and Drug Branch](#)
- **Identify potential cases of H5 bird flu in pets.** Take a detailed diet and bird exposure history for any sick pet. Determine whether exposure to H5 bird flu may have occurred through contact with poultry, wild birds, or consumption of raw pet food or raw products (especially if product has been recalled). This is especially important if the pet has fever, severe lethargy, loss of appetite, icterus, hepatopathy, respiratory symptoms, uveitis, or neurologic signs such as seizures, nystagmus, or blindness.
- **Information to collect if H5 bird flu exposure via raw pet food or other raw dairy or meat product is suspected.**
 - Obtain the full commercial name of the food products, lot numbers, “best before” dates.

- Determine when the animals were fed the product and how much was consumed (if known).
- Obtain information about where and when the product was purchased.
- Ask the pet owner to take photos of the front and back surfaces of each product, as well as an image of the purchase receipt.
- Ask the pet owner to retain the food for potential testing. Both opened and unopened products should be doubled bagged, sealed, and kept frozen in case they are later needed by a state or federal agency for testing. Remind the pet owner to always wear gloves and wash hands after handling any raw pet food product.
- **Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)** when in contact with sick cats that have a history of exposure to raw products or that are suspected or confirmed to have H5 bird flu. Review safety documents and share them with staff:
 - [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Guidance for Animal Control, Shelter and Veterinary Facilities in Los Angeles County](#)
 - [Considerations for Veterinarians: Evaluating and Handling of Cats Potentially Exposed to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A \(H5N1\) Virus](#)
- **Ensure appropriate cleaning and disinfection (C & D) protocols are observed after seeing an animal that is suspected to have H5 bird flu.**
 - [Occupational Health And Safety Administration, Avian Influenza Control and Prevention](#)
 - [Disinfection 101, an overview of C&D basics, including disinfection methods, factors affecting the process, and safety considerations.](#)
- **Be prepared to discuss suspected H5 bird flu cases with the Department of Public Health.** You may need to provide medical records and information about staff exposed to sick animals to facilitate monitoring and protection of employee health.
- **If you are seeing a potential case of H5 bird flu in an animal in LA County**
 - **What to do**
 - Place the animal in isolation.
 - Limit the number of staff handling the animal as much as possible.

- Instruct staff that handle the animal to wear appropriate PPE, which includes an N95 mask, gloves, eye protection, shoe protection, and a gown, at minimum.
 - Collect detailed information about the potential exposure to H5 bird flu, including a detailed dietary history as described above, and any exposure to wild birds or other animals. Ask the pet owner to document and safely store any remaining food as described above.
 - **Report the suspected case to Veterinary Public Health.** 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 or vet@ph.lacounty.gov.
- **What to Expect**
- One of our Public Health Veterinarians will call you to discuss the case.
 - **Free testing for Influenza A virus and H5 bird flu** may be available through our laboratory. We may provide you with a test kit for this purpose. **Specific criteria for testing are typically:**
 - **A clear epidemiologic link such as a confirmed history of consumption of raw milk, raw pet food, or raw poultry/meat, or exposure to a potentially infected animal; and**
 - **Acute onset of compatible clinical signs including: fever, severe lethargy, loss of appetite, acute respiratory disease, acute neurologic disease, hepatopathy/icterus, or uveitis.**
 - If the animal tests positive for Influenza A, the Department of Public Health will contact all staff that handled the animal to monitor their health for 10 days after the last exposure, as well as offer testing and post-exposure treatment if indicated.
 - Inform the pet owner that they may be called by a Public Health Veterinarian to learn more about the case.

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 Veterinary Public Health Program (VPH) – [H5 Bird Flu in Los Angeles County](#)
 - [January 13, 2025 Animal Health Alert regarding previous cases of H5 bird flu in Los Angeles County cats](#)
- US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) – [Statement on a recent case of H5N1 in a cat that consumed raw pet food in San Francisco](#)
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH) – [Current Bird Flu Situation](#)
- California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) – [Avian Influenza Updates](#)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – [Considerations for Veterinarians: Evaluating and Handling of Cats Potentially Exposed to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A \(H5N1\) Virus](#)
- 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) – [H5N1 Influenza: Detections of HPAI](#)

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