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# URGENT HEALTH BULLETIN

## Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 in Kern County

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(<https://kernpublichealth.com/health-bulletin/>)

October 5, 2024

Dear Kern County Healthcare Provider:

This urgent health bulletin is being sent to call your attention to the risk of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A H5N1 in Kern County.

- **Summary**

Since 2022, HPAI A(H5N1) has been detected in more than 10,000 wild birds, 100,000 poultry and 255 dairy herds across the United States. Since August 2024, multiple dairies in the Central Valley have identified cattle infected with HPAI A(H5N1). Kern County Public Health is currently investigating a presumptive positive case of HPAI A(H5N1). Healthcare providers are reminded to consider HPAI A (H5N1) in persons with consistent symptoms and potential exposures.

- **Background**

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is a severe viral infection primarily affecting birds, particularly poultry. Caused by certain strains of the influenza A virus, notably H5N1, HPAI can lead to significant mortality rates in infected flocks and has the potential to spread rapidly among bird populations. The virus can also pose a risk to humans. The risk to the general population is low and human cases are rare, however those in frequent close contact with infected animals are at higher risk. A multistate outbreak of HPAI A(H5N1) in dairy cows was reported on March 25, 2024, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) announced detections of HPAI A(H5N1) in Central Valley dairy herds. People working in close contact with infected cattle are at higher risk of being infected with HPAI A(H5N1). Conjunctivitis has been the most common symptom in people who have contracted H5N1 as a result of working with infected cattle.

- **Recommendations for Healthcare Providers and Healthcare Facilities**

Healthcare providers are recommended to do the following:

- **Consider HPAI A(H5N1)** in any patient with potential exposure to infected animals and compatible symptoms.
- **Isolate** the patient and implement infection control measures.
- **Immediately report** any suspected or confirmed case of HPAI A(H5N1) to Kern County Public Health by phone at (661) 321-3000 during regular business hours or (661) 241-3255 on nights, weekends, and holidays.
- **Collect specimens** for laboratory testing wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- **Consider** testing for other respiratory illnesses based on local epidemiology.
- **Treat** patients with empiric antiviral treatment as soon as possible.

*Grounded in Health*

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- **Signs and Symptoms of HPAI A(H5N1)**

- Conjunctivitis with or without other symptoms.
- Uncomplicated upper respiratory signs (e.g. cough, sore throat) with or without fever
- Fever (infections do not always cause fever, especially among those 65 or older and people with immunosuppression)
- Muscle or body aches, headaches, and/or fatigue.
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Less common symptoms may include diarrhea, nausea, or vomiting.

- **Isolation and Infection Control Considerations**

Suspect patients should immediately be isolated away from others in a negative pressure area, if possible. Standard, contact, and airborne precautions are required for patients presenting for medical care or evaluation who have illness consistent with influenza and recent exposure to potentially infected animals. For additional guidance on infection control precautions for patients who might be infected with novel or avian influenza virus, please refer to [CDC's Infection Control Guidance within Healthcare Settings when Caring for Patients with Novel Influenza A viruses; Cal/OSHA's Protection from Avian Influenza](#) website; and [California Code of Regulations, Title 8, Section 5199-Aerosol Transmissible Diseases](#).

Use an antimicrobial product from [EPA's List M](#), which have been shown to be effective against avian influenza virus. Follow the manufacturer's directions to ensure the product is applied to a potentially contaminated surface for the recommended contact time.

Reinforce the importance of good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette with patients. Suspected or confirmed cases should remain home unless seeking medical care until their symptoms have resolved. Whenever possible, before entering a healthcare facility, patients should notify the healthcare facility that they have a suspected or confirmed avian influenza infection so appropriate precautions can be taken.

- **Specimen Collection and Laboratory Testing**

Currently, testing for HPAI A(H5N1) is only available at Public Health Laboratories. Contact Kern County Public Health to request testing. Once approved, specimens should be collected according to the following guidelines:

- Appropriate PPE must be worn during specimen collection.
- Swabs used for specimen collection must be Dacron or another synthetic material with an aluminum or plastic shaft.
- For patients presenting with respiratory symptoms collect the following specimens:
  - Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab in viral transport medium (VTM) or universal transport medium (UTM)
  - Combined nasal and oropharyngeal swab with both swabs in either VTM or UTM.
- For patients presenting with conjunctivitis, collect the following additional specimen:
  - Conjunctival swab in VTM or UTM. See [CDC's Conjunctival Swab Specimen Collection for Detection of Avian Influenza A\(H5\) Viruses](#) document for more information regarding conjunctival swab specimen collection.
  - Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab in viral transport medium (VTM) or universal transport medium (UTM)
  - Combined nasal and oropharyngeal swab with both swabs in either VTM or UTM.

- **Vaccination, Treatment, and Chemoprophylaxis**

Seasonal influenza vaccines are not effective against HPAI A(H5N1). Antiviral treatment is recommended as soon as possible for all patients with suspected or confirmed HPAI A(H5N1) virus infections. Antiviral treatment should not be delayed while waiting for laboratory test results. The standard treatment for adolescents and adults is oral oseltamivir 75 mg twice daily for 5 days. Children 12 years and younger may be recommended for smaller dosage based on weight. Dosage adjustment is needed in adult patients with renal impairment. Oseltamivir is not recommended for people with end-stage renal disease (ESRD) who are not receiving dialysis. Refer to [CDC's Interim Guidance on the Use of Antiviral Medications for Treatment of Human Infections with Novel Influenza A Viruses Associated with Severe Human Disease](#) for additional information.

Close contacts to a suspected or confirmed HPAI A(H5N1) case are recommended to receive post-exposure prophylaxis in accordance with CDC's [Emergency Use Instructions](#). This includes a higher total daily dose and flexible duration. Similar to treatment of suspected or confirmed cases, contacts should receive oral oseltamivir 75 mg twice daily for 5 days after last exposure. For persons with ongoing exposures, 10 days of chemoprophylaxis is recommended. Smaller children are recommended to receive a smaller dosage based on weight.

- **Reporting Suspected or Confirmed Cases**

In accordance with Title 17, Section 2500, all suspected or confirmed cases of influenza due to novel strains (including HPAI A(H5N1)) must be reported to Kern County Public Health. Please call (661) 321-3000 during regular business hours to report a case or request testing. After hours, on weekends, and holidays, call (661) 241-3255 to be connected to the On-Call Public Health staff.

- **Additional Resources**

- CDPH: [Novel Influenza](#)
- CDPH: [Avian and Novel Influenza Quicksheet](#)
- CDPH [CDPH Worker Protection from the Bird Flu](#)
- CDC: [CDC - Clinician Brief: Evaluating and Managing Patients Exposed to Animals or Persons Infected with Novel Influenza A Viruses of Public Health Concern](#)
- CDC: [Interim Guidance on the Use of Antiviral Medications for Treatment of Human Infections with Novel Influenza A Viruses Associated with Severe Human Disease](#)
- CDC: [Interim Guidance for Follow-up of Close Contacts of Persons Infected with Novel Influenza A Viruses Associated with Severe Human Disease or with Potential to Cause Severe Human Disease, and Use of Antiviral Medications for Post-exposure Prophylaxis](#)
- CDC: [Interim Guidance for Infection Control Within Healthcare Settings When Caring for Confirmed Cases, Probable Cases, and Cases Under Investigation for Infection with Novel Influenza A Viruses Associated with Severe Disease](#)

If you have any questions, please contact KCPHSD by phone at 661-321-3000, via email at [publichealth@kerncounty.com](mailto:publichealth@kerncounty.com), or visit the [KCPHSD website](#).

Thank you,

*Kristopher Lyon, MD*

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Health Officer