



WHAT OHIO HUNTERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA (HPAI H5N1) – THE SO-CALLED “BIRD FLU”

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI H5N1), popularly known as the “bird flu,” has been circulating globally in birds, humans and other mammals. Low-pathogenic avian influenza has existed for years in Ohio’s wild bird populations. The newly arrived highly pathological strain has not yet mutated into a form that is easily spread from birds to humans or from one human to another. However, since wild game can carry a variety of pathogens, it is always important to use general precautions when hunting or field dressing any animal.

- **Is all the concern about avian influenza justified?**

Public health officials around the world are concerned because influenza viruses are constantly changing (genetically mutating) with new strains of flu viruses emerging annually. Some strains of influenza from birds can infect mammals or humans. The worst-case scenario would be if a new avian influenza strain mutated and was able to be spread directly from person to person.

- **How does avian influenza spread among birds?**

Infected birds shed influenza virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with contaminated excretions or with surfaces that are contaminated with excretions or secretions. Domesticated birds may become infected with avian influenza virus through direct contact with infected wild fowl or through contact with surfaces (such as dirt or cages) or materials (such as water or feed) that have been contaminated with the virus. Most of the wild birds that are traditionally associated with highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses are waterfowl and shore birds.

- **Is it OK to hunt and eat Ohio’s wild game?**

Yes. Proper handling and cooking provides protection against HPAI H5N1 virus, as well as many other viruses and bacteria, including Salmonella and E. coli. Safe food handling and preparation are important at all times. Hunters should follow routine precautions when handling or field dressing waterfowl and game birds:

- 1) Do not handle or eat visibly sick game.
- 2) Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning all game; thoroughly wash hands or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner after cleaning; thoroughly clean knives, equipment, and surfaces that come in contact with game. The HPAI H5N1 virus and other pathogens are deactivated with many common disinfectants such as detergents, 10 percent household bleach, rubbing alcohol, and other commercial disinfectants.

- 3) Launder hunting clothes and wash hunting boots with detergent. Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling animals.
- 4) All game should be thoroughly cooked (“well done” or 155-165 °F). Use a meat thermometer for accuracy.

- **Is there ongoing research on HPAI H5N1 among Ohio’s wild birds?**

Yes, the Ohio Division of Wildlife will take direction from the Ohio Department of Agriculture in the further sampling of wild birds for avian influenza.

- **If biologists/researchers test a duck or goose that I shot, will I be told the results of the test?**

There are no plans to get individual results back to the hunter. It may be weeks or months before a single sample can be completely tested. Also, if the duck or goose is properly cooked and handled, there is no risk to those who eat it.

- **My hunting dog ate a dead bird. Should I be concerned?**

Contact your local veterinarian if you have concerns about your hunting dog or pet killing a bird, eating a dead wild bird, or killing/eating poultry. If your veterinarian feels that your pet is at risk for avian influenza, the Ohio Department of Agriculture can test for avian influenza at no charge. However, if a differential diagnosis is required, there is a charge for that service.

More information on HPAI H5N1 is available at:

USGS National Wildlife Health Center

http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/avian_influenza/index.jsp