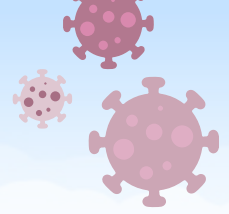


# Avian influenza

Information for northern communities — Content updated in May 2025



**!** Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been detected in wild birds and mammals in Canada. Northern residents should stay informed and watch for birds and other wildlife with signs of avian influenza.

## What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza is a disease caused by a virus. Birds can easily catch this virus from each other. The virus spreads rapidly, so if there are several dead birds in one location the virus may be present. Not all infected birds appear sick.

Signs to look for in **birds**:

- nervousness
- lack of energy or movement
- tremors or lack of coordination
- swelling around the head, neck, and eyes
- coughing, sneezing, or gasping for air
- diarrhea
- sudden death

## What is the risk to humans?

**It is safe to eat fully cooked game bird meat and eggs.** The risk of people catching avian influenza from wild birds or other wildlife is low but increases with direct contact with infected animals, especially when gutting, plucking and cleaning game.

As a precaution, hunters should:

- wear gloves
- work in a well-ventilated environment
- wash hands with soap and water
- clean and disinfect equipment
- wash or change clothing after handling birds or eggs

## What is the risk to other animals?

The risk of other animals catching avian influenza from wild birds is low; however, dogs and wild carnivores (foxes, mink, bears, and seals, etc.) can also become ill from eating infected birds or from exposure to environments where the avian influenza virus is heavily present. It is a good practice for hunters and trappers to be careful when handling wild carnivores, and to prevent dogs to get in contact with sick or dead wildlife or scavenge on carcasses. Also avoid feeding pets raw meat from wild birds.



Polar Knowledge  
Canada

Savoir polaire  
Canada

Canada

## What precautions should you take when hunting or harvesting eggs?

It is safe to hunt wild birds and harvest eggs if you follow the recommendations below. Avian influenza virus may be present on the shells and in the whites and yolks of eggs laid by infected birds. Infected birds may not look sick. To protect your health and prevent the spread of the virus:



Do not handle or eat birds or other wildlife that look sick or have died from unknown causes.



Where possible, work outdoors, and wear gloves (vinyl, latex, nitrile, rubber) when preparing harvested birds or handling eggs to avoid direct contact with blood, feces and mucus. Consider protecting your mouth and eyes (mask and safety glasses or face shield), especially when working indoors.



Avoid touching your face and do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling birds or eggs.



Separate clean and dirty eggs during collection. Do not collect eggs that are cracked or very dirty.



Rub dirt and debris off the eggs with a clean and dry paper towel, cloth, or brush. Do not wash or soak eggs with water. Water can allow germs to enter the egg.



Always wash your hands right after handling harvested animals, birds, or eggs. It is best to wash hands with soap and water (at least 20 seconds). If you cannot use soap and water, use hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol).



Always thoroughly wash and disinfect all equipment and surfaces that touch the eggs or birds. Use soapy water first, then sanitize using a household disinfectant or a bleach solution (3 tbsp bleach to 8 cups water), allowing at least 10 minutes contact.



As soon as you are finished, remove and wash and/or change clothing and footwear that may be contaminated with blood, feces, or mucus. When you move between separate bird colonies, brush soil and vegetation off your boots and clothing, change your gloves and use hand sanitizer to avoid spreading the virus.

Getting your seasonal flu shot will lower the risk of getting human and avian influenza at the same time and help prevent the development of new viruses.

**!** If you become ill with influenza symptoms after handling wild birds, wild bird eggs or other wildlife, contact your local health centre as soon as possible and inform them you have been in contact with wildlife.

## How do you cook or prepare wild bird meat or harvested eggs?

It is safe for people to consume **fully cooked** game birds or eggs. Avian influenza virus may be present in dried meat. To reduce your risk of exposure to avian influenza and other diseases, it is important to follow these recommendations:

### 1 Fully cook game meat and eggs. Freezing does not kill the virus!

- Avoid eating raw or partially cooked eggs (runny yolk).
- Avoid using raw eggs in foods that will not be cooked or baked.
- Ensure meat is fully cooked with no pink meat and until juices run clear.

It is best to use a digital food thermometer, cleaning it after each use.

### 2 Follow general safe food handling practices

- Keep raw meat, organs and eggs separate from other foods to avoid cross-contamination.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling raw meat, organs or eggs.
- Clean and sanitize your prep area including countertops, cutting boards, and knives.



## COOK WELL!

to an internal temperature of:

Meat pieces or eggs → 74°C (165°F)

Whole bird → 82°C (180°F)



## What should you do if you find dead or sick birds?

**!** If you see dead birds or birds acting strangely, tell the Conservation Officer in your community.

Do not handle wild birds or other wildlife that are found dead or acting strangely. If you must touch a wild bird or any other wildlife that was found dead, wear gloves or use a doubled plastic bag and avoid contact with the animal's body fluids and feces. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Avian influenza has also been found in wildlife other than wild birds. You are always encouraged to report sightings of wildlife acting strangely or dead wildlife to your local Conservation Office!

## Stay informed

1. Get up-to-date information at your local Conservation Office and local Public Health authority
2. Visit [canada.ca/avian-flu-arctic](https://canada.ca/avian-flu-arctic)

