

HPAI in U.S. Dairy Cow Herds

Updated: 4/5/24

HPAI in Dairy Cattle – FAQ for External Use

On March 25, 2024, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has been confirmed in dairy cattle in several states.

For the latest information and guidance from USDA APHIS, please [click here](#).

What is Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)?

HPAI, commonly known as “bird flu,” is a virus that spreads naturally among wild aquatic birds. Detections of HPAI in birds, including chickens, are common in the United States in the spring and fall due to wild birds spreading the virus as they migrate to and from their seasonal habitats.

Is this the first time HPAI has affected dairy cattle?

It is uncommon for HPAI to affect dairy cattle. That said, dairy farmers have taken immediate steps to enhance biosecurity measures in and around dairy farms. It’s important to note that the milk supply already is safe, and that safety is being maintained.

Can I get HPAI (or “bird flu”) from consuming dairy products or eating meat?

No. Milk and other dairy products are safe to consume.

As the [USDA, FDA and CDC note](#), there continues to be no concern about the safety of the commercial milk supply because products are pasteurized before entering the market. Further, this circumstance poses no risk to consumer health, and according to the USDA and FDA, [meat remains safe to consume](#).

As for pasteurization, and in keeping with the Federal Grade “A” Pasteurized Milk Ordinance, milk from sick cows is diverted or destroyed, and is not allowed to enter the food supply chain. This means affected dairy cows are segregated, as is normal practice with any animal health concern, and their milk does not enter the food supply.

It’s important to note that pasteurization also kills harmful bacteria. Pasteurization is the process of heating raw milk to 161.5°F for 15 seconds and then immediately cooling it.

Where has HPAI in dairy cattle been detected?

Please refer to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service [website](#) for the latest information on this.

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How is the virus transmitted?

The virus spreads naturally among wild aquatic birds. Detections of HPAI in birds, including chickens, are common in the United States in the spring and fall due to wild birds spreading the virus as they migrate to and from their seasonal habitats.

The spread of symptoms among herds in some states indicates that HPAI transmission between cattle cannot be ruled out. USDA and partners continue to monitor this closely and have advised veterinarians and producers to practice good biosecurity, test animals before movements, minimize animal movements and isolate sick cattle from the herd.

What are the symptoms in dairy cattle?

Symptoms include decreased herd level milk production; acute sudden drop in production with some severely impacted cows experiencing thicker, concentrated, colostrum-like milk; decrease in feed consumption with a simultaneous drop in rumen motility; abnormal tacky or loose feces, lethargy, dehydration, and fever.

Do dairy cows die from HPAI?

There is little to no mortality reported. Infected dairy cows fully recover within a few weeks.

Can humans get HPAI, also known as “bird flu,” from cattle or from other animals?

The current risk to the public remains low. However, people with close or prolonged, unprotected exposures to infected birds or other animals (including livestock), or to environments contaminated by infected birds or other animals, are at greater risk of infection.

As the [CDC indicated on April 1](#), a person in the U.S. tested positive for HPAI. This individual had exposure to dairy cattle in Texas presumed to be infected with HPAI, which resulted in this patient having eye redness as the only symptom.

Enhanced biosecurity measures are in place to protect dairy cows and those humans in direct contact with infected animals.

Why are chickens usually depopulated with an HPAI outbreak whereas the cows impacted by the current situation are not?

HPAI is a fatal illness in [poultry and birds](#). With cows, we are seeing recovery in about two weeks. At this stage, [the USDA and APHIS](#) do not anticipate the need to depopulate dairy herds.

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Is raw milk safe to consume?

FDA's longstanding position is that unpasteurized, raw milk can harbor dangerous microorganisms that can pose serious health risks to consumers, and FDA is reminding consumers of the risks associated with raw milk consumption in light of the HPAI detections.

Will the cost or availability of dairy products be affected by HPAI?

No, we do not anticipate an impact on the supply or price of dairy products.

What are dairy producers doing to prevent further spread of avian influenza?

Dairy farmers have taken immediate steps to enhance biosecurity practices – measures taken on farms to prevent disease – to keep cattle and workforces healthy. These biosecurity practices include limiting visitors, washing equipment and avoiding contact with wild birds and other animals that may carry disease. That said, disease can still get onto a farm via wild birds that are difficult to keep away from livestock.

With all of this in mind, it's important to note that the milk supply has been safe and will continue to be safe.

Where can I go for more information?

Experts continue to closely monitor the health of dairy cattle, and farms are operating under heightened biosecurity. [Click here](#) for the latest information from USDA APHIS.