Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can humans catch avian influenza from wild birds?
A: There are no known cases where the highly pathogenic (HPAI) H5N1 virus has been passed from wild birds to humans, but direct transmission from wild birds to humans may be possible.

Q: How could HPAI H5N1 arrive in North America?
A: Migratory birds, particularly waterfowl and shorebirds, cross the Bering Sea between Alaska and Asia during their seasonal cycles of breeding, molting, and wintering. The role of wild migratory birds in the spread of HPAI H5N1 between regions remains poorly understood, and it is not clear whether the HPAI H5N1 virus is persistent in wild bird populations or whether wild birds pose a long-distance, long-term risk. If it arrives in North America, the HPAI H5N1 virus is more likely to be transported by people who are infected, or through virus-contaminated articles or illegally imported birds or bird products.

Q: What is the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources doing about avian influenza?
A: The UDWR will be testing the following hunter-harvested waterfowl species during the fall hunts: Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, and Tundra Swan, as part of a surveillance program implemented to provide early detection of HPAI H5N1 should it appear in Utah.

For More Information:

National Wildlife Health Center:
http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/avian_influenza/index.jsp

United States Avian Influenza Site:
http://www.avianflu.gov/
http://www.pandemicflu.gov/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm

For updates on wildlife health in Utah:
http://www.wildlife.utah.gov/

Division of Wildlife Resources Contact Information:

Main Office: (801) 538-4700
1594 W. North Temple, Salt Lake City, UT 84116

Northern Region: (801) 476-2740
515 East 5300 South, Ogden, UT 84405

Central Region: (801) 491-5678
1115 North Main Street, Springville, UT 84663

Northeastern Region: (435) 781-9453
152 East 100 North, Vernal, UT 84078

Southern Region: (435) 865-6100
1470 North Airport Road, Cedar City, UT 84720

Southeastern Region: (435) 636-0260
475 West Price River Drive, Suite C, Price, UT 84501
If you find a large group of dead waterfowl, contact wildlife authorities. Please do not pick up or handle sick or dead animals!

Avian Influenza Facts

Avian influenza is common in wild bird populations, but usually affects small numbers of birds and typically causes few, if any, symptoms. The virus is spread through nasal and oral discharges, and fecal droppings. Few bird viruses are able to infect humans, but influenza viruses are able to adapt and change over time. In 1997, a highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 virus in Hong Kong was able to spread directly from birds to humans.

HPAI H5N1 is very contagious among certain birds and is deadly to domestic poultry, such as chickens and ducks. Mortality rate in poultry can reach 90-100% often within 48 hours. Occurrence of the HPAI H5N1 virus in wild migratory birds is most frequent in waterfowl and shorebirds.

Recommendations for Hunters

While it’s highly unlikely that hunters could contract avian influenza from wild birds, following these standard precautions reduces the risk of contracting any wildlife disease:

- Do not harvest any animal that appears sick, and do not pick up diseased or dead wildlife.
- Do not handle or eat sick game.
- Keep your game birds cool, clean, and dry.
- Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning birds, wash hands with soap and water, and thoroughly clean all knives, equipment, and surfaces that come in contact with birds. Disinfect using a 10% chlorine bleach solution.
- All game should be cooked thoroughly (well done or 160 degrees F).
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling game.