



# Protecting Dogs from H5N1 Bird Flu

Avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, is a viral disease that primarily affects birds. Some strains cause mild disease, while others, including H5N1, can cause severe illness and death in birds. The virus can spread through droppings, feathers, saliva, and other body fluids, and can be carried by wild birds, including migratory birds and seabirds. In the right conditions, the virus can survive in the environment for months and can spread through contaminated clothing and shoes, contact with infected birds or other infected animals, or contaminated environments or surfaces.

Despite the name, bird flu doesn't only affect birds. The H5N1 strain has been detected overseas in mammals, including seals, foxes, cats and, very rarely, dogs. As of September 2026 in Australia, H5N1 bird flu has been detected in various bird species, red foxes, long-nosed fur seals, and dolphins.

*Latest statistics on cases of H5N1 bird flu in Australia can be found here - [Bird flu \(avian influenza\) - DAFF](#)*

This does not mean dog owners need to be fearful, but it does mean close attention should be paid to the situations that increase risk: contact with sick or dead birds, exposure to infected poultry or wildlife, and raw animal products.

During outbreaks, the bird flu virus can spread through contact with infected birds, their droppings, feathers, or contaminated environments. Wild birds are the primary carriers, but backyard poultry and pet birds may also be at risk, especially during significant outbreaks.

## Signs of Bird Flu in Pets

As cases are rare in pets, the disease process is not fully understood. Infected dogs or cats may show signs including:

- Respiratory issues: Coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge
- Conjunctivitis
- Lethargy
- Loss of appetite
- Fever
- Neurological symptoms: Rare, but may include wobbliness or seizures

## How to minimise the risk to dogs during a Bird Flu outbreak

1. Limit Contact with Birds:
  - Prevent dogs from interacting with wild birds (dead or alive), bird droppings, or bird feeders.
2. Supervise Dogs Outside:
  - Keep dogs on lead when walking especially around beaches, lakes, wetlands and other places where wild birds gather.
  - Do not allow dogs to swim in water frequented by wild birds.
  - Monitor dogs in your yard, where possible, to ensure they don't interact with birds or contaminated areas.

## 3. Practice Good Hygiene:

- Clean and disinfect your dog's food and water bowls regularly, especially those kept outside.
- Where possible move their food and water bowls to areas protected from wild birds.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling birds, bird feeders, or any outdoor surfaces that might be contaminated.

## 4. Avoid Feeding Dogs Raw Poultry or Unpasteurized (Raw) Milk:

- Refrain from giving your pets raw or undercooked poultry products or raw milk during an outbreak where cases have been detected in poultry/cows.

## Can a dog get H5 Bird Flu from eating bird droppings?

Potentially. It would have to be fairly fresh droppings from an infected bird, with enough of a viral load to cause infection. The risk is low in most situations however, if a dog is "grazing" in an area with a lot of infected birds and a lot of bird droppings this would increase the risk.

*H5 bird flu primarily affects birds, and the risk to cats and dogs in Victoria is very low.*

*A small number of infections have been reported in companion animals overseas since this strain of H5 bird flu started circulating the world 6 years ago. These have generally been limited to very few instances of close exposure to infected animals. Close exposure includes eating infected birds.*

*There is no evidence that companion animals play a role in the spread of H5 bird flu. Internationally, cats appear more susceptible to H5N1 infection than dogs, although infections in companion animals are overall uncommon.*

*Pet owners are advised to prevent pets from interacting with sick and dead wildlife. This is to protect their pets and to prevent stress to wild animals.*

*Pet owners can help minimise risks to their pets by:*

- keeping pets away from wildlife, including preventing cats from roaming and keeping dogs on leads in wildlife areas
- watching for serious illness in pets and contacting your vet if your pet is unwell.

*Anyone who finds sick or dead wildlife should avoid contact, record what they see and report it on Agriculture Victoria's bird flu website or to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.*

*Source: Agriculture Victoria Website*