

Avian Influenza

British Columbia is observing increased avian influenza activity again this fall. **This includes one recently reported human case in Fraser Health, as well as multiple reports of infected birds on agricultural premises. One Vancouver Island farm in late October reported animal cases, but no human cases were associated with this incident.** At this time, no other avian influenza in animals has been reported on Vancouver Island this season. There may be concern among your patients and community due to these recent events.

Human to human transmission of this H5 strain of avian influenza has not been observed to date. Animal to human transmission is the principal route of infection.

Island Health Communicable Disease Program's Role in Avian Influenza

Island Health Communicable Disease responds to lab-confirmed cases of animal avian influenza if human exposure to infected animals is identified. While the risk of humans developing avian influenza after contact with infected animals remains very low, we endeavor to notify those who have been exposed and, as a precaution, ask them to monitor for symptoms of influenza-like illness, stay home if they develop illness and refer for testing to rule out avian influenza infection. If the exposure is assessed as high risk, we may recommend antiviral prophylaxis.

Clinical Guidance for Suspect Cases of Avian Influenza

Please maintain an index of suspicion for avian influenza for patients who report having been exposed to animals with **confirmed** avian influenza AND who develop influenza-like symptoms within 10 days of the exposure.

For patients in whom avian influenza is in the differential diagnosis:

- Immediately notify the Island Health Communicable disease program at: **1-866-665-6626** in South Island or **1-877-770-7798** in Central Island
- Collect a nasopharyngeal and throat swab and send to the BCCDC Public Health Laboratory *via Island Health labs*. Routing specimens through the Island Health lab will minimize turn around times.
- When assessing and testing patients with suspect avian influenza, use *contact and droplet* precautions. Airborne precautions are appropriate for any necessary aerosol generating medical procedures.
- Advise the patient to stay away from others for seven days or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer. Please advise no attendance at work, school or other public locations while isolating.
- Antivirals should be readily prescribed for the treatment of suspected and confirmed cases of avian influenza with acute respiratory symptoms. Oseltamivir treatment (75 mg twice daily x 5 days for adults) may reduce the severity of illness, especially if administered within 48 hours of illness onset.

Island Health Medical Health Officers

Chief MHO: Dr. Réka Gustafson 250-519-3406; North Island: Dr. Charmaine Enns 250-331-8591

Central Island: 250-739-6304; Cowichan Region: Dr. Stéphane Trépanier 250-737-2020

South Island: Dr. Mike Benusic, Dr. Murray Fyfe, Dr. Dee Hoyano, Dr. Christina Kay 250-519-3406

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Prevention advice for patients

Although most avian influenza detections in animals have affected agricultural animals, sporadic exposures to humans can occur from wild animals, particularly wild birds. People can take the following steps to reduce the risk of exposure to avian influenza:

- Stay up to date on the seasonal flu vaccine. People that care for poultry, other agricultural animals or wildlife should be immunized annually for influenza. The seasonal vaccine does not protect against avian influenza, but it does reduce the chance of co-infection of influenza and the potential for reassortment of avian and human influenza strains.
- Avoid direct contact with all birds at petting zoos/open farms at this time.
- Do not touch sick or dead animals or their droppings and do not bring sick wild animals into the home.
- Keep children and pets away from sick or dead animals and their feces.
- Monitor closely the health of farm animals and backyard bird flocks. Take measures to reduce contact between wild and domestic birds.
- Report dead or sick birds or animals. For more information about reporting dead or ill animals, people can be directed to this BC Government webpage for more information:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/wildlife/wildlife-conservation/wildlife-health/what-to-do-if-you-find-sick-injured-or-dead-wildlife>

Additional information about Avian Influenza can be found on the BCCDC website at: [Avian Influenza \(bccdc.ca\)](https://www.bccdc.ca/health-topics/avian-influenza)

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