

Guidance for Veterinary Practices with Suspect Cases of H5 Bird Flu in Pets

Communicating with pet owners about H5 bird flu risks

- **Strongly advise pet owners NOT to consume nor feed their pets raw dairy, raw meat, raw poultry, or raw pet food diets.** Share information about the [risks to both human and pet health when feeding raw diets](#).
- **Stay aware of recalls and share them with pet owners.** Both pet products and human grade products that are fed to pets may be recalled:
 - [FDA Recalls, Market Withdrawals and Safety Alerts](#)
 - [California Department of Public Health – Food and Drug Branch](#)
- **Identify potential cases of H5 bird flu in pets.**
 - Take a detailed diet history for any sick pet.
 - Determine whether exposure to H5 Bird Flu may have occurred through consumption of raw pet food or raw products (especially if the product has been recalled).
 - **Information to collect if H5 Bird flu exposure from raw pet food or other raw dairy or meat product is suspected:**
 - Obtain the full commercial name of the food products, lot numbers, “best before” dates.
 - Determine when the animals were fed the product and how much was consumed (if known)
 - Obtain information about where and when the product was purchased.
 - Ask the pet owner to take photos of the front and back surfaces of each product package, as well as an image of the purchase receipt.
 - Ask the pet owner to retain the food for potential testing. Both opened and unopened products should be doubled bagged, sealed, and kept frozen in case they are later needed for testing by a state or federal agency. Remind the pet owner to always wear gloves and wash hands after handling any raw pet food product.

What to do if you are seeing a potential case of H5 bird flu in an animal in LA County

- Place the animal in isolation. Limit exposure to other animals and clients.
- Limit the number of staff handling the animal as much as possible.
- Instruct staff to wear appropriate [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) that includes an N95 mask, gloves, eye protection, shoe protection, and a gown, at minimum, when in contact with animals suspected or confirmed to have H5 bird flu. Review safety documents and share them with staff:
 - [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Guidance for Animal Control, Shelter, and Veterinary Facilities in Los Angeles County](#)
 - [CDC's Considerations for Veterinarians: Evaluating and Handling of Cats Potentially Exposed to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A \(H5N1\) Virus](#)
- Collect the information detailed above regarding exposures and **report the suspected case to Veterinary Public Health** using the [HPAI-specific reporting form](#).
 - Email the report form along with medical records and lab results to vet@ph.lacounty.gov.
 - Compile a list of staff exposed to sick animals to facilitate monitoring and protection of employee health.
 - One of our Public Health Veterinarians will call you to discuss the case.
 - Free testing for influenza A virus and H5 bird flu may be available through our laboratory. We may provide you with a test kit for this purpose.
 - If the animal tests positive for influenza A virus, the Department of Public Health will contact all staff that handled the animal to monitor their health for 10 days after the last exposure, as well as offer testing and post-exposure treatment if indicated.
 - Inform the pet owner that they may be called by a public health veterinarian to learn more about the case.



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Instructions for H5 Bird Flu Sampling of Animals with Veterinary Public Health Test Kits

Public Health is offering testing in cases that are highly suspicious for H5 bird flu that have a clear epidemiologic link plus acute onset of significant compatible clinical signs. A clear epidemiologic link includes confirmed history of consumption of raw milk, raw pet food, or raw poultry/meat. Significant compatible clinical signs include fever, severe lethargy, loss of appetite, acute respiratory disease, acute neurologic disease, hepatopathy/icterus, and uveitis.

If you have suspect cases of H5 bird flu in animals, contact Veterinary Public Health at 213-288-7060 or email vet@ph.lacounty.gov to request Influenza A test kits.

Storage

- Store test kits at room temperature before use. Store away from heat and away from sunlight.
- REFRIGERATE test kits after specimens are collected.

Safety

- When handling an animal that is suspected of having H5 Bird flu, ISOLATE the animal away from other animals.
- Minimize the number of staff handling them animal.
- All staff handling sick or suspect animals should wear PPE including: N95 respirator, eye protection such as goggles, gloves, disposable gown, shoe covers, and hair cover.

Instructions for specimen collection from MAMMALS (cats, dogs)

- Note that there are 2 vials per test kit.
- Collect 2 separate specimens, using **2 separate swabs - one oropharyngeal swab and one rectal swab**. Do not pool samples from different patients or different anatomic sampling locations.
- After collection, place each swab in a separate vial, snap off part of the swab stem at the narrow point and leave the bottom part of the swab inside the vial. Screw cap back on vial tightly.
- **LABEL each vial completely with the following patient information:**
 - source of sample (oropharyngeal or rectal); name of the animal (first and last); species (cat, dog); date specimen collected
- Complete the included reporting form and email a copy to vet@ph.lacounty.gov along with relevant medical records and laboratory results for the patient.
- Place the reporting form in the front pocket of the specimen bag and refrigerate. DO NOT PLACE in a food refrigerator – store specimens in refrigerator for medical use only. DO NOT FREEZE.

Instructions for specimen collection from BIRDS

- Collect 1 cloacal specimen
- Snap off part of the swab stem at the narrow point and leave the bottom part of the swab inside the vial. Screw cap back on vial tightly.
- **LABEL each vial completely with the following:**
 - source of sample(cloacal); name of the animal (first and last); species of bird; date specimen collected
- Complete the included reporting form and email a copy to vet@ph.lacounty.gov along with relevant medical records and laboratory results for the patient.
- Place the reporting form in the front pocket of the specimen bag and refrigerate. DO NOT PLACE in a food refrigerator – store specimens in a refrigerator medical use only. DO NOT FREEZE.

Veterinarians and animal health workers are encouraged to contact us with any questions by email:

vet@ph.lacounty.gov, or by phone: 213-288-7060 (Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm). Please visit our [VPH webpage for more information about H5 bird flu.](#)

