Q&A From Lunch and Learn:
Wild Birds & Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

(Questions submitted by participants; answers are current as of 2/28/2025)

Indiana State Board of Animal Health

Q: "How much of a role do sparrows/songbirds have in the spread of the virus?"

A: Songbirds can carry the virus and are not heavily affected by it. Making it hard to tell where the songbirds are carrying the virus because there are no mortality events in them.

Q: "What is the strategy of the DNR for testing wild birds and mammals for HPAI?"

A: DNR is testing wild birds whenever there is a small or large mortality event. DNR is trying to locate the virus in new areas and keep track of where in the state the virus is.

Q: "When cleaning a bird feeder or birdbath, should you follow the same PPE guidelines as you would if you found a dead bird?"

A: Yes, even outside of avian influenza, it's a good idea to wear gloves and a mask when you are cleaning your bird feeders. Songbirds can carry salmonella with them so it is always a good idea to wear gloves and a mask when you're cleaning your bird feeder.

Q: "Has DNR come across any white-tailed deer with the virus?"

A: Nobody has found it in white-tailed deer. DNR has not detected any cases in Indiana. To date, there have been no national HPAI cases in deer.

Q: "Has the virus been detected in any domestic chickens?"

A: Yes. Domestic chickens are susceptible. BOAH is reporting domestic poultry findings at https://www.in.gov/boah/species-information/avianbirds/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza/

Q: "How long does the virus live in the soil where those dead carcasses are being left?"

A: It largely depends on the temperature. The virus will stay stable in the environment, longer at colder temperatures, and as the temperatures start to rise the virus will not stay stable in the environment for long. At around 60-70 degrees, it can last two weeks. It is possible for the virus to last up to two months, and it is also possible for it to last indefinitely. There is a little bit of a debate going on, but as the temperatures start to warm up, it doesn't seem to last in the environment quite as long.

Q: "What symptoms appear in dairy cattle when they come in contact with HPAI?"

A: Cattle may be asymptomatic (sub-clinical), or symptomatic (clinical). Clinical signs may include a decrease in feed consumption with a simultaneous decrease in rumination and rumen motility; respiratory signs including clear nasal discharge; and subsequent acute drop in milk production.

Q: "What percent of human influenza testing is looking for H5N1? Is this a requested test or routinely performed?"

A: H5N1 is an influenza A. The routine tests that we see in our over-the-counter tests, like rapid tests, can pick up influenza A or B. So, if you had an individual with H5N1 they would show positive for influenza A. At that point, some additional steps would need to take place and additional testing will be required.

Q: "Can beef cattle and dairy cattle get HPAI?"

A: Yes, signs in beef cattle are difficult to detect. Their milk output is not generally monitored like dairy cows.

Q: "As we head into the warmer weather months, should we expect to see a decrease in HPAI cases?"

A: This is very hard to predict. In 2015 (although a different strain), we saw poultry cases continue through the summer months.

Q: "Is a CVI or NPIP certificate sufficient for importing quail or pheasant eggs or do they need a permit from BOAH first (depending on the state)?"

A: Game birds are included in BOAH's definition of poultry. When it comes to entry requirements they have to come in on a CVI or NPIP 9-3 and be tested for PT. BOAH does not have a requirement for an HPAI test except for certain birds originating from or moving into an HPAI control area. More information about NPIP: https://www.inpoultry.com/npip

Q: "How safe is pet food? I heard about raw cat food making cats sick?"

A: BOAH and FDA advise AGAINST feeding raw and under-cooked meat, egg, and dairy diets to pets especially cats.

Q: "Is the State doing anything to warn and discourage the feeding of raw diets, especially
A: with poultry or milk products?"

Yes, we have been reiterating that in media interviews, social media and sending guidance to veterinarians.

Q: "What if a flock owner refuses testing out of fear that they will have their birds
A: destroyed? Should we still report suspicious cases and how/to whom?"

Reporting is important because domestic poultry that is infected is most likely going to die. Here is the link to BOAH's reporting form: https://www.in.gov/boah/species-information/avianbirds/small-flock-and-exhibition-poultry/sick-andor-dead-poultry-questionnaire/

Q: "Can Horses get sick with HPAI?"

A: Horses can sometimes become infected and mount an antibody response, but prevalence is low in the equine population so likely there has been no horse-to-horse transmission. https://equimanagement.com/research-medical/disease/h5n1-bird-flu-surveillance-in-u-s-horses/

Q: "How does this affect the water supply? Can it get in the groundwater where the birds are buried?"

A: For domestic poultry being buried: BOAH does a lot of research with assistance from other agencies before approving a disposal site and plans to ensure human, animal, and environmental health are protected. All state (IDEM) and federal (EPA) setbacks are met or exceeded for any site selected. BOAH consults USDA soil survey maps, Indiana DNR water wells database, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetlands Inventory before site selection, along with considerations for setbacks from homes, roadways, farms, and water sources.

Q: "How close are we to having a vaccine ready?"

A: While other countries use vaccines for poultry, the US does not for multiple reasons.

- Vaccinated birds can still become infected, and these vaccinated birds can be asymptomatic and spread the virus to other flocks, animals, or humans where the virus can potentially mutate.
- The US eradicates the virus when it shows up in domestic birds to prevent the spread of AI.
- The poultry industry will lose billions in trade revenue if vaccines are used, and many countries will not recognize vaccinated meat as bird flu-free.
- Many countries have import restrictions on poultry and poultry products from countries that use vaccines.
- Vaccinating billions of birds is more expensive than current indemnities and depopulation costs.
- Vaccinating billions of birds in all sectors of the poultry industry may not be attainable as it is a very complex and difficult task.

Q: "Any advice for handling bird feeders?"

A: Currently, DNR is not recommending people to take down their bird feeders. However, when cleaning and refilling bird feeders, you should wear disposable gloves and a protective mask.

Q: "What or where should my front office staff in my veterinary office tell people to go for questions on risks to their pets, cats, dogs, and even pet birds?"

A: FDA guidance: https://www.fda.gov/animal-veterinary/cvm-updates/fda-outlines-ways-reduce-risk-hpai-cats

Q: "Can you please elaborate on what you are seeing in domestic goats?"

A: Info on the finding in a Minnesota goat https://www.avma.org/news/goat-minnesota-tests-positive-hpai

Q: "What should you do if your dog eats a dead bird?"

A: The likelihood of dogs getting bird flu is very low. However, ingestion of raw milk and/or raw poultry products (meat) can increase their chances of infection. Owners should try to avoid their dogs ingesting wild birds (for many reasons). If they observe their dog ingesting a wild bird, they should monitor for clinical signs, including fever, lethargy, decreased appetite, respiratory, and/or neurological signs. If noted, they should contact their veterinarian for diagnostics and treatment.