



Alaska departments of Health & Social Services, Fish & Game, and Environmental Conservation; U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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PRESS RELEASE

Contacts: See media advisory

STATE, FEDERAL AGENCIES EXPRESS CONCERN OVER MADE-FOR-TV MOVIE TITLED “FATAL CONTACT: BIRD FLU IN AMERICA”

(Juneau, Alaska) -- State and federal agencies today expressed concern that the upcoming made-for-television movie, “Fatal Contact: Bird Flu in America,” could foster unnecessary and widespread public fear regarding H5N1 avian influenza (“bird flu”).

Together, the Alaska Departments of Environmental Conservation, Fish and Game, and Health and Social Services, along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey, want to mitigate any unwarranted concerns that may arise regarding H5N1 bird flu as a result of viewing the dramatization about an influenza pandemic.

“People who watch the movie need to keep in mind that it is not a documentary. It is a work of fiction, not a factual accounting of a real world event,” said Dr. Jay Butler, epidemiology section chief for the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. “While the movie raises awareness about avian and pandemic flu, we hope it will inspire people to be prepared, not scared.”

“This particular strain of bird flu is almost exclusively a bird disease that has not yet been found on the North American Continent,” said Matt Robus, Director of the Division of Wildlife Conservation at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. “At this point, it is still unclear what role, if any, migratory birds play in the movement of this virus or whether they can carry it to North America.”

“Even if the H5N1 virus were to appear in Alaska in birds or animals, it would not necessarily start a human pandemic,” said Dr. Butler. “We don’t know if the H5N1 virus will ever mutate into a form that will easily spread from animals to humans or human to human.”

In the meantime, state and federal agencies are working together to assure the public that the H5N1 virus in birds currently poses a low risk to human health. Coordinated state and federal efforts to monitor and test for the H5N1 virus in wild and domestic birds in Alaska are also underway. Throughout our preparations, we will continue to communicate with the media and the public to ensure accurate information is released in a timely manner.

To further educate and inform Alaskans regarding our preparedness efforts, the H5N1 bird flu, and how to prepare for a possible pandemic, the state has developed a website at www.avianflu.alaska.gov or www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov. The website includes specific information and advice for hunters, pet owners, businesses, government officials, health care providers and other key stakeholders.

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