

To: Natural Resource/Conservation Managers  
From: Leslie Dierauf, Director, USGS National Wildlife Health Center  
Title: Some basic flu facts regarding the ABC Movie “Fatal Contact: Bird Flu in America”  
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The ABC movie, “Fatal Contact: Bird Flu in America,” dramatically explores the fictitious impact of a worst-case scenario of human flu pandemic in the United States and around the globe.

To ensure you have the facts about bird flu and wild birds, Department of the Interior (DOI) scientists have prepared a list of important flu facts, answers to common questions about bird flu, and provided links to more detailed information. It is important to stay informed of the ever-changing status of bird flu and the risks these viruses pose to people, domestic poultry, and wildlife.

**Influenza pandemics are caused by the global spread of a new influenza virus that has adapted to humans and is easily transmitted from person to person.**

- **There is currently no human influenza pandemic occurring anywhere in the world.**
- **At present, the current H5N1 bird flu virus does not easily infect people and rarely spreads from person to person.**
- **Scientists are concerned that H5N1, or another strain of influenza, could mutate to become a human flu virus that is easily transmitted from person to person and this could trigger an influenza pandemic.**

**The U.S. National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza is guiding the U.S. preparedness and response to an influenza pandemic, with the three goals of Preparedness and Communication; Surveillance and Detection; and Response and Containment.**

**For more information about pandemic flu and human influenza, visit:**

[The U.S. Government’s pandemic and avian flu Web site](#)

[The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site](#)

[The World Health Organization’s Web site](#)

**Avian influenza is a common disease of birds that rarely infects humans.**

- Avian influenza viruses are classified as having low pathogenicity or high pathogenicity based on the severity of the illness they cause in poultry, and most are not considered a public health threat.
- Highly pathogenic strains, like highly pathogenic H5N1, cause severe illness and rapid death in poultry.
- Migratory birds—typically waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls and terns—are natural carriers of avian influenza, and are considered the natural reservoir for low-pathogenic strains of the disease.

**Most human cases of avian influenza have occurred in people with close contact with infected poultry.**

- Avian influenza, including the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain, does not easily infect humans.
- When the H5N1 strain has infected humans, it is a very serious disease; while only about 200 people are known to have contracted the disease, about half of them have died.
- Person-to-person transmission of avian influenza, including the H5N1 strain, is extremely rare.

**The highly pathogenic H5N1 strain has spread to large geographic areas in Asia, Europe, and Africa where it has primarily affected domestic poultry.**

- H5N1 has caused the largest and most severe outbreaks in poultry on record.
- Legal and illegal movement of infected birds, poultry products, contaminated materials, equipment, and vehicles, as well as wild bird migration are the most likely ways that H5N1 is spread.

- H5N1 has been eliminated from countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Israel by quick and efficient eradication of the disease in domestic poultry.

For more information on avian influenza in domestic animals go to [the U.S. Department of Agriculture Avian Influenza Web page](#).

**The highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of avian influenza has not been detected in North America.**

- Federal and state domestic animal, wildlife, and public health agencies are working closely to prepare, prevent and respond to the potential introduction of highly pathogenic H5N1 virus into the United States.
- If the highly pathogenic H5N1 is detected in wild birds in the United States it does not necessarily pose a threat to U.S. poultry industry or to the general public.
- Should the current H5N1 be detected in North America it will not signal the start of a flu pandemic

**The U.S. Departments of Interior, Agriculture and Health and Human Services are working with other federal and state agencies in implementing a National *Early Detection System for Highly Pathogenic H5N1 Avian Influenza in Wild Migratory Birds* focused on:**

- Rapid investigation of wild bird mortality in the U.S.
- Surveillance in live wild birds
- Surveillance in hunter-killed wild birds
- The use of sentinel species to detect H5N1
- Environmental sampling of areas frequented by wild birds

For more information on the interagency surveillance plan go to: [Interagency National H5N1 Surveillance Plan](#).

**The impact of highly pathogenic H5N1 on migratory birds and the role that wild birds play in the spread of H5N1 is unclear.**

- Highly pathogenic H5N1 has been detected in an increasing number of wild bird species; however the numbers of wild birds infected with H5N1 has been relatively low.
- In many cases, scientists are uncertain if wild birds were the source of the H5N1 virus or if they acquired it from poultry, although once infected, wild birds could transport the virus to a new location.
- There is currently no scientific basis for controlling highly pathogenic H5N1 by management of wild birds beyond physically segregating poultry from exposure to wild birds.

For more information about avian influenza and H5N1 in wild birds go to:

[U.S. Department of the Interior's Avian Influenza](#)

[USGS National Wildlife Health Center's avian influenza Web site](#)

[USGS Alaska Science Center](#)

[Wildlife Disease Information Node](#)

[Alaska Pandemic Flu webpage](#)

[Southeast Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study](#)

**Hunters should follow routine precautions when handling game.**

- Do not handle or eat sick game.
- Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning game, wash hands and thoroughly clean knives, equipment and surfaces that come in contact with game.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling animals.
- All game and poultry products should be thoroughly cooked (well done or 160°F).

**For more safety information on avian influenza:**

[Alaska Hunter Fact Sheet](#)

[USGS Wildlife Health Bulletin](#)

[World Health Organization Safe Food Preparation Guide](#)