

HPAI A(H5) Scenario-Based Human Health Risk Assessment



HPAI A(H5) Scenario-Based Human Health Risk Assessment for the United States Center for Outbreak Response Innovation (CORI) Updated as of November 19, 2024

In this update, the Center for Outbreak Response Innovation (CORI) reports the latest developments in the H5N1 outbreak; the risk levels remain unchanged.

	Risk to farm workers	Risk to other people in contact with affected workers and animal populations	Risk to healthcare workers	Risk to the US general public
NEW Scenario for Increased Potential for Human Adaptation and Increased Human Reports: Increased potential for reassortment and human adaptation, increased reports of human infections, potential early laboratory/epidemiological/sequencing evidence for human-to-human transmission but still no human-to-human transmission confirmed	High	Moderate	Low*	Low*

*While the immediate risk to the general public and healthcare workers is still currently low, the long-term consequences of continued, uncontrolled transmission presents a high risk to all populations. For this reason, along with the uncertainty and complexity of these events, CORI will continue to monitor the situation and update this risk assessment. For a detailed analysis, including limitations and recommendations see the next page.

Since the last report, six additional human cases of H5 have been confirmed by CDC, all due to transmission from agricultural animals to humans without any evidence of human-to-human transmission. [Health officials have confirmed](#) that the Canadian teen in critical care for avian influenza tested positive for H5N1 clade 2.3.3.4b genotype D1.1. The source of the infection for the Canadian human case remains unknown and the investigation is ongoing. USDA has reported additional infected cattle herds and affected flocks, including in Hawaii for the first time. On November 18, [Hawaii health officials confirmed H5N1 in a flock of birds that were present at a pet fair open to the public on November 2](#). Health officials report that the birds became symptomatic several days after the fair and no human infections have been reported at this time. Individuals who had contact with ducks or geese at the fair are being encouraged to monitor for symptoms of flu-like illness or conjunctivitis. No suspected human cases of H5N1 in connection with the event have been identified at this time. Based on this recent event, CORI is highlighting key [CDC recommendations for individuals planning agricultural or other events that bring together birds, cattle, and swine](#).

These recent developments do not change the current risk scenario. For the risk scenario to increase, limited human-to-human transmission would need to be confirmed. For the risk level to decrease, there would need to be a decline in human cases and a reduction in opportunities for reassortment (eg widespread utilization of PPE by farm workers and others in contact with animals and/or a decline in animal cases).

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Critical Epidemiological Updates

- [Health officials have confirmed](#) that the Canadian teen in critical care for avian influenza tested positive for H5N1 clade 2.3.3.4b genotype D1.1, which has been detected among poultry farmers in the US but is different than the H5N1 clade 2.3.3.4b genotype B3.13 detected in cattle and humans in contact with cattle. The source of the infection remains unknown and the investigation is ongoing
- On November 18, [Hawaii health officials confirmed the presence of H5N1 in a flock of birds that were present at a pet fair open to the public on November 2](#). Health officials report that the birds became symptomatic several days after the fair. Individuals who had contact with ducks or geese at the fair are being encouraged to monitor for symptoms of flu-like illness or conjunctivitis, although the likelihood of infection is expected to be low. No suspected human cases of H5N1 in connection with the event have been identified at this time

Routine Surveillance Updates

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is reporting [53 confirmed human cases](#) of H5 in the United States as of November 19, 2024
- The United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service ([USDA APHIS](#)) has reported 216 new infected cattle herds across four states in the last 30 days, bringing the total for the outbreak to 549 cattle herds in 15 states. This represents a slight increase compared to the previous 30 days
- CDC reports that for the duration of the outbreak, [250 tests for poultry workers and 131 tests for dairy workers have been sent to CDC for H5N1 testing](#), resulting in a positivity rate since March 2024 of 8.40% (21/250) and 23.67% (31/131), respectively

Cattle Worker Positivity Rate: 23.67%
Poultry Worker Positivity Rate: 8.40%

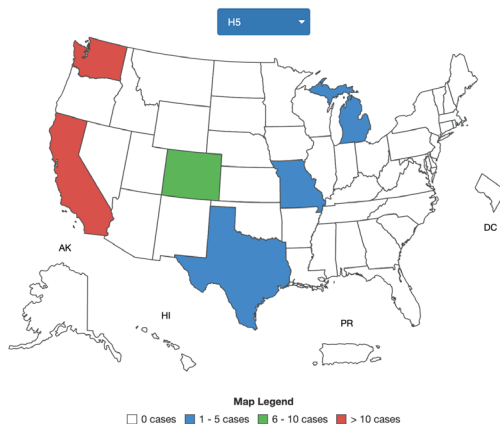


Figure 1: 2024 Map of Human H5 Infections ([available from CDC](#))

Total Cattle Herds Affected: 549 in 15 states
Total Swine Affected: 1 in 1 state

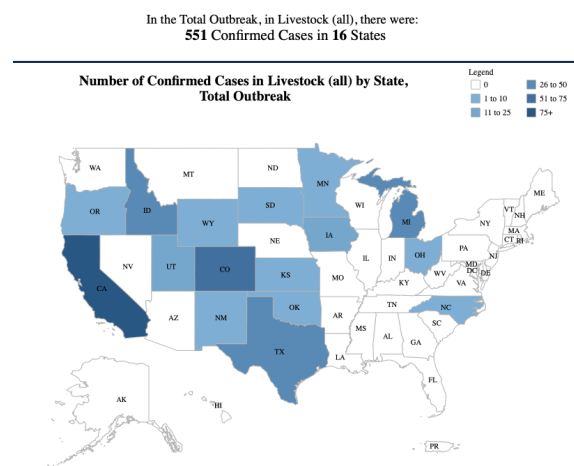


Figure 2: HPAI Confirmed Cases in All Livestock ([available from USDA APHIS](#))

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Critical Limitations

- Information on the true prevalence and incidence of affected animals remains limited because [testing is only required by USDA when moving cattle across state lines](#). This gap in information may be ameliorated in part by new efforts for bulk milk testing
- Testing for humans remains limited due to many factors: 1) commercial testing is unavailable, 2) testing must first be completed for seasonal flu, and then tests that are positive for influenza A but cannot be subtyped must be sent to CDC for H5N1 confirmation, 3) targeted surveillance efforts are limited to commercial farms that are aware of the infection in their animals, and are open to health department involvement, 4) symptom reporting by affected farm workers is likely vastly underreported due to the complex relationship between farm workers and owners, and may be impacted by stigma, fear of government involvement, and concerns about missing work
- CDC [human case numbers](#) are updated on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, while [number of tests conducted](#) by each exposure category (poultry, dairy cows) are based on weekly counts, this can lead to some fluctuations in positivity rates

Recommendations

In the current scenario, it is vital to:

- 1. Prevent reassortment opportunities, especially during the current flu season**
 - Farm workers diligently use personal protective equipment (PPE; including masks goggles, gloves, gowns, head covers, and boot covers) when working directly with or closely to cattle and poultry, other infected or potentially animals, and potentially infected environments
 - Farm workers receive the seasonal flu vaccine as early as possible in the current flu season
 - Individuals working with agricultural animals who are sick do not report to work, especially if they exhibit respiratory or flu-like symptoms, and seek medical care for diagnosis
 - Individuals working with agricultural animals who are sick and unable to stay home wear a KN95 mask when in contact with animals
 - [Individuals planning agricultural or other events that bring together birds, cattle, and swine, should consider](#) testing animals before exhibits or events, promoting good hygiene at events, and taking extra steps to ensure that sick animals remain at home and animals who become sick at or recently following an event are seen by a veterinarian

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2. Ensure timely, accurate surveillance and prevention of H5N1 in agricultural animals

- Increased diagnostic testing and genomic surveillance in cattle and poultry.
- Separation of infected cattle during convalescence
- Enforced cattle import restrictions to limit the movement of infected cattle across state borders
- Stringent control of potentially infected food products (removal of milk or other infected products)

3. Continue enhanced public health activities to prevent H5N1 transmission to and among humans

- Increased focus on sentinel surveillance, wastewater surveillance, and education of clinicians to consider H5N1 as a possible diagnosis for people who present with new respiratory illness
- Implementation of and support for recommended isolation of human cases and quarantine of close contacts of cases through escalated case finding and contact tracing, antiviral (eg, Tamiflu) prophylaxis for those exposed, compensation for individuals who are isolated/quarantined and cannot report to work, and social support to provide for essential needs of those in isolation/quarantine
- Continued development and widespread implementation of antigen and molecular testing in both hospital and outpatient healthcare settings
- Increased public health surveillance for H5N1 cases in local communities

4. Continue enhanced, open communication about the current situation and potential risks

- Information sharing between the agricultural and public health sectors to increase transparency and monitor for increases in animal-to-human or human-to-human transmission
- Enhanced communication with the public about the situation and the measures being taken to address it, as well as efforts to mitigate the spread of rumors and disinformation

5. Continue and consider strengthening political support for public health response

- Policy preparation for the possibility of a pandemic, including congressional deliberations about emergency funding and emergency planning by healthcare institutions, workplaces, and federal, state, territorial, local, and tribal public health agencies
- Increased investment and urgent development, testing, and production of vaccines and treatment options

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Appendix

Scenarios

***Please note:** We are evaluating the risks to human health should each scenario occur, **not** the relative risk of any one scenario occurring.

Features that would characterize each scenario include:

Scenario for Minimal Spread in Cattle: *The virus is predominantly infecting cattle but there is minimal spread within herds and to other animals.* Likelihood of widespread human infections is low. Population health consequences are low. Overall risk to human health in this scenario is low.

Scenario for Widespread Transmission in Cattle: *Widespread transmission in cattle, few human infections, no human-to-human transmission.* The virus is predominantly infecting cattle but spreads widely within herds. There is also occasional cow-to-human transmission. There are few human infections but no human-to-human transmission. Likelihood of widespread human infections is low. Population health consequences are low. Overall risk is low, but population-specific risk is increased for farm workers.

Scenario for Potential Human Adaptation: *There is increased potential for reassortment and human adaptation, but still no human-to-human transmission.* The virus begins to infect swine or other animal species that could facilitate the mixing and spreading of influenza viruses. This increases the likelihood that the virus reassorts with other influenza viruses and adapts to humans. Although the opportunities for reassortment are present, there are no specific mutations, laboratory or epidemiological evidence indicate that the virus has adapted for human-to-human transmission. Likelihood of widespread human infections is low. Population health consequences are low. Overall risk of widespread transmission in humans is low, but risk is increased for farm workers. The relative risk of a future pandemic has increased, but the absolute risk remains low.

Scenario for Increased Potential for Human Adaptation and Increased Human Reports: *There is increased potential for reassortment and human adaptation, increased reports of human infections, potential early laboratory/epidemiological/sequencing evidence for human-to-human transmission but still no human-to-human transmission confirmed.* The virus has been observed in animal mixing vessels, including pigs, and additional reassortment opportunities are present, such as mixing of the H5N1 virus with the seasonal flu virus, due to the ongoing seasonal respiratory virus season (October to April), that increase the risk of human adaptation. There are more reports of human infections due to contact with infected animals like cattle, swine, and/or poultry. Viral mutations, laboratory or epidemiological evidence may be reported that indicate the potential for human-to-human transmission, but

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there are no confirmed reports of human-to-human transmission. Population health consequences are low. Overall risk of widespread transmission in humans is low, but risk is increased for farm workers and individuals who work with animals, and close contacts of those workers. The relative risk of a future pandemic has increased, but the absolute risk remains low.

Scenario for Limited Human Transmission: *There is continued potential for reassortment, increasing reports of human infections, limited human-to-human transmission between close contacts.* There are more reports of human infections due to contact with infected animals like cattle, swine, and/or poultry. Limited human-to-human transmission is reported among close contacts of infected individuals, including healthcare workers, but there is no efficient human-to-human transmission. Likelihood of widespread human infections is moderate. Population health consequences are low. Overall risk of widespread transmission is low, but population-specific risk is increased for farm workers, close contacts of farm workers, and healthcare workers. The likelihood of a future pandemic is increased.

Scenario for Sustained Human Transmission: *There are reports of efficient human-to-human transmission.* Likelihood of human infections is high because the virus now transmits efficiently and will be very difficult to contain. Population health consequences are high. Overall risk is high for all populations. The likelihood of a pandemic is very high.

H5N1 Human Health Risk Assessment Scenario Table

	Risk to farm workers	Risk to other people in contact with affected workers and animal populations	Risk to healthcare workers	Risk to the US general public
Scenario for Minimal Spread in Cattle: The virus is predominantly infecting cattle but there is minimal spread within herds and to other animals	Low	Low	Low	Low
Scenario for Widespread Transmission in Cattle: Widespread transmission in cattle, few human infections, no human-to-human transmission	Moderate	Low	Low	Low
Scenario for Potential Human Adaptation: Increased potential for reassortment and human adaptation, still no human-to-human transmission	Moderate-High	Low	Low	Low

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<p>NEW Scenario for Increased Potential for Human Adaptation and Increased Human Reports: Increased potential for reassortment and human adaptation, increased reports of human infections, potential early laboratory/epidemiological/sequencing evidence for human-to-human transmission but still no human-to-human transmission confirmed</p>	High	Moderate	Low	Low
<p>Scenario for Limited Human Transmission: Continued potential for reassortment, increasing reports of human infections, limited human-to-human transmission between close contacts</p>	High	Moderate-High	Moderate	Low-Moderate
<p>Scenario for Sustained Human Transmission: Efficient human-to-human transmission</p>	High	High	High	High

References

- Government of Canada. Statement from the Public Health Agency of Canada: Update on Avian Influenza and Risk to Canadians. November 13, 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2024/11/update-on-avian-influenza-and-risk-to-canadians.html>
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- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation. Updated November 18, 2024. Accessed November 19, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html>
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