

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Media Toolkit

Updated 2/2026

Hello and thank you for taking an interest in the current state of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in the state of Minnesota and the work of the Minnesota Board of Animal Health in combatting the disease. HPAI is a virulent and highly infectious disease that spreads easily among birds causing high rates of mortality and significant financial losses. By downloading this document, you will have at your disposal background information on the disease, the most recent outbreak and efforts of state and federal agencies to eradicate HPAI from Minnesota's commercial and backyard poultry flocks.

Finally, we have included contact information for our media relations team, so you have a way to seek out more information, and interviews with subject matter experts on poultry diseases.

About the Board

The mission of the Minnesota Board of Animal Health is to protect the health of the state's domestic animals through education and cooperation with veterinarians, producers, owners and communities. The Board builds bulwarks against animal disease by facilitating partnership with industry, state and federal government, and animal producers through proactive surveillance, interventions, and collaboration.

The Board is helmed by State Veterinarian and Executive Director Dr. Brian Hoefs. Assistant Directors are Dr. Erik Jopp and Dr. Shauna Voss. The Executive Director reports to the Board of Directors, appointed by the governor of Minnesota. The Board of Directors is made up of a mixture of commercial animal producers and veterinarians. More details on the Board of Directors, including upcoming meetings of the Board of Directors and our regular newsletters, can be found on [our website \(http://bah.state.mn.us/board-members\)](http://bah.state.mn.us/board-members).

For details on individual programs and the actions taken in the past year, view [our Annual Report \(https://bah.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/documents/annual-report.pdf\)](https://bah.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/documents/annual-report.pdf)

Background

The current wave of HPAI was first confirmed in Meeker County in the spring of 2022 and has since affected more than 200 flocks in the state. Minnesota has successfully identified, responded to, and eliminated this and other influenza viruses in poultry in past years.

Minnesota Specific Information and Risks

The Current Picture

As of Feb. 2, 2026, more than 215 flocks have tested positive impacting more than 10.3 million birds.

For the most up-to-date information on the 2022-2026 disease event, please visit [our website \(https://bah.state.mn.us/hpai\)](https://bah.state.mn.us/hpai).

For the latest information on the national HPAI response, please visit the [United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service website \(https://www.aphis.usda.gov/h5n1-hpai\)](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/h5n1-hpai)

Why here?

- Minnesota is positioned geographically to encounter many migratory wild birds as they begin to traverse the country.
- Because Minnesota is the first state many migratory birds enter after contracting the virus during summer nesting periods, the viral load is high, and the virus is more easily spread.
- Many wild birds travel through the state during migrations due to the high number of lakes and wetlands in the state.
- Minnesota is the state with the largest population of commercial turkeys in the country. With more commercial poultry operations in the state than elsewhere, there are more opportunities for the virus to spread either through wild bird migration or commercial operation cross contamination.

Why should people still care?

- The virus that causes HPAI is an H5 strain of the influenza virus. We know that viruses do not stay the same over time and continue to mutate and change as they move through populations. While new variants appear regularly, in the last analysis they are all H5 strains, which has a high mortality rate. Vigilance and good biosecurity practices are necessary to stop the virus.
- Preventing the spread of the virus is possible through biosecurity and effective measures taken when the virus appears in the state.
 - HPAI infections can independently pop up around the state due to wild bird introductions of the virus into commercial or backyard poultry operations. This sort of infection is more difficult to prevent, but steps can be taken to reduce contact with wild bird populations and discourage wild birds from approaching commercial operations
 - Lateral transmission, or when the virus moves from one commercial poultry operation to another, is preventable through proactive biosecurity efforts and quick action when the virus is detected.

How Our Response Works

When HPAI is discovered in Minnesota:

1. The USDA and Board of Animal Health make the official announcement.
2. There is a network of state and federal agencies working in concert with the poultry industry to minimize the impact of HPAI outbreaks and regain Minnesota's disease-free status.

3. Affected flocks are depopulated to reduce the risk of disease transmission.
 - During an HPAI outbreak, depopulating flocks is done to eliminate the disease. Not depopulating can lead to a greater number of birds suffering the terrible effects of HPAI and spreading the disease further.
4. The producer and animal health officials work together to create a flock plan on affected farms, which includes protocol on carcass disposal and cleaning/disinfection of barns.
5. An updated tally of affected flocks and response actions is posted on the Board's [website \(https://bah.state.mn.us/hpai\)](https://bah.state.mn.us/hpai).

Biosecurity

Biosecurity is the key defense for all poultry flocks. Biosecurity is the way flocks are managed and the various practices put in place to isolate flocks from outside sources of infection. Biosecurity is very important for commercial poultry flocks with a lot of birds to protect them and to prevent the spread of any disease.

For more information on biosecurity and steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of disease spread, visit our [Biosecurity webpage \(https://bah.state.mn.us/biosecurity\)](https://bah.state.mn.us/biosecurity).

The Role of Partner Agencies

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)

MDH's primary role is to protect and monitor human health by coordinating with animal health agencies, local public health, and industry to monitor the health of poultry workers and others in direct contact with infected birds for 10 days after their last exposure. People who develop respiratory symptoms may be voluntarily tested for avian influenza and other respiratory pathogens. MDH provides guidance for poultry workers and backyard flock owners on personal protective equipment and precautions to take while handling affected birds. The risk to the public is extremely low. Any risk of infection would be limited to people in direct contact with affected birds.

MDH serves as a source of information for the industry and the public on human health risks associated with HPAI viruses. People can visit the [MDH H5N1 webpage \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/current/current.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/current/current.html) for additional human health information.

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Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA)

The role of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture is to protect the safety of our food supply and to provide personnel and other resources for HPAI response. Poultry and poultry products are safe to eat when properly

handled and cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. Commercial poultry flocks are tested prior to going to market. All HPAI-affected poultry are prohibited by law from entering the marketplace.

For more information on the MDA response to HPAI, visit [the MDA website \(https://www.mda.state.mn.us/hpai\)](https://www.mda.state.mn.us/hpai).

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Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

The role of the DNR is to monitor and track incidence of HPAI appearing in wild birds in the state of Minnesota. DNR partners with USDA's Wildlife Services branch to participate in national surveillance programs, as funding allows. The DNR is also continuing to monitor reports of five or more dead wild birds in the same location and timeframe. Wild birds suspected of potentially carrying HPAI will be sent to the National Wildlife Health Center or Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory for testing.

Although type-A influenza in Minnesota waterfowl is common, the H5 and H7 subtypes are not. Wild birds are typically not affected by low pathogenic type-A influenza strains – only highly pathogenic strains cause sickness and death in some wild birds.

For more information on the DNR response to HPAI in wildlife, visit [the DNR website \(https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/wildlifedisease/avian-influenza.html\)](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/wildlifedisease/avian-influenza.html)

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United States Department of Agriculture – Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS)

USDA-APHIS works closely with Minnesota's state agencies and the poultry industry to prevent avian influenza from becoming established in the U.S. poultry population. APHIS coordinates prevention and control programs to help avoid outbreaks and supports surveillance in commercial breeding, production and backyard poultry flocks. The USDA also maintains trade restrictions on the import of poultry and poultry products from regions of other countries affected by avian influenza. When HPAI is detected in any U.S. state, APHIS coordinates the emergency response and works closely with Board staff to implement response strategies.

For more information on the USDA-APHIS response to HPAI, visit [their webpage \(https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza\)](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza)

Branding

A full guide to applicable State of Minnesota branding is available. More information on Board specific branding can be found on our [style guide webpage \(https://bah.state.mn.us/style-guide\)](https://bah.state.mn.us/style-guide). Questions or concerns regarding branding should be directed to the Board communications team.

Contact

For all interview requests:

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