

New York State Wildlife Health Program (WHP)

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Field Guidance

Mortality Response

The Wildlife Health Program is monitoring the spread and impact of HPAI in the state. The response depends on the specific event, so refer to the guidance below. **With the exceptions noted below (larger events, sensitive locations, or species), a physical response by staff is not necessary in most cases.**

When taking a call, please utilize and direct members of the public to utilize the **NYSDEC Avian Influenza Reporting Form**: <https://arcg.is/1S9nrf2>

If you respond to collect samples or carcasses, record a count (or estimate) of dead/sick from each species and an estimate of the number of live/seemingly unaffected birds or other species present. Include location data (coordinates), date of first observation, and environmental conditions. Report large mortality events to the WHU even if samples are not collected for testing.

In cases where DEC field staff are not responding to collect samples or carcasses from the landscape, please instruct members of the public to limit contact with dead wildlife and to keep children and pets away. If removal is deemed necessary by the landowner, the landowner should be instructed to wear disposable gloves, a mask, and eye protection. They should avoid direct contact with the carcass or carcass fluids by using a shovel and wash their hands and clothing immediately after with soap and hot water. Carcasses should be triple-bagged (garbage or contractor bags) and put in an outdoor trash receptacle.

The Wildlife Health Program is interested in examining and testing specimens from the following scenarios:

- Mortality events involving 20+ ducks or geese in counties without HPAI detections in 2025
- Mortality events involving 12+ shorebirds or gulls in counties without HPAI detections in 2025
- Mortality events involving 12+ dead crows or ravens in counties without HPAI detections in 2025
- Any multiple dead/sick swans
- Any single or multiple dead/sick eagles (or other raptors if the cause is unknown)

In larger-scale mortalities in new areas, *please collect **three** of the freshest-looking carcasses from each species affected*. Place in individual bags to avoid cross-contamination. If feasible, collect all remaining dead birds for disposal to remove them from the landscape and make them unavailable to scavengers. Follow the [Wildlife Health Specimen Submission Guidelines](#) and call the WHU if any guidance is needed.

Live Animal Response

There is no treatment for HPAI and transporting suspect HPAI-infected birds to wildlife rehabilitation facilities is discouraged to prevent the spread of the disease to other animals in care. When responding to a mortality event and higher-risk bird species that have clinical signs suggestive of HPAI (and not attributable to trauma or toxicity) are present, euthanasia should be considered at the discretion of field staff and with permission from the Regional Wildlife Manager. Do not euthanize birds in places within public view, and follow the [Euthanasia SOP](#) (updated 2024). Contact the WHP for further guidance on testing. Carcasses of suspect animals should be triple-bagged and frozen until testing. PPE used to handle the carcass can be included prior to the third bag. If an animal is confirmed to have avian influenza, disposal options will need to be coordinated with the WHP.

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) during known HPAI outbreak:

When handling any high-risk species, live or dead, the minimum PPE should be gloves (latex, nitrile, or rubber), a disposable mask (N95 or KN95 recommended), eye protection or face shield, and rubber boots or waders. This includes handling any waterfowl for banding. In addition, wearing disposable Tyvek coveralls during these activities will protect clothing and should be worn when responding to large mortality events. The boots or waders and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected on-site with Virkon or 10% bleach solution so the HPAI virus is not transported to another site. If responding to a report of a single dead bird of a lower-risk species, minimum PPE should be a mask or face shield and gloves.

As always, care should be taken not to contaminate your clothing and to position yourself upwind of the carcass while bagging the specimen. Don't drink, eat, or smoke when handling wild birds. Be mindful of handling other objects or touching your face (pens, cell phones) while wearing contaminated gloves. After removing your gloves, wash your hands thoroughly for at least 30 seconds (using soap/water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer).

If you keep backyard poultry or other birds, you should change clothing and shoes, shower, and disinfect any equipment used before handling live wild birds (banding, netting, etc.). The same precautions should be taken between fieldwork and returning home.

Risk of HPAI infection for field staff:

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that the recent HPAI detections in birds pose a low risk to the public. HPAI H5N1 has been detected in over 60 humans in the United States, including one mortality. Infected birds shed avian influenza viruses in their saliva, mucus, and feces. Human infections with avian influenza viruses can happen when enough virus gets into a person's eyes, nose, or mouth or is inhaled. There is likely little risk for the public, but people with close or prolonged unprotected contact with infected birds or virus-contaminated environments, especially immunocompromised people, will be at greater risk of infection. Wildlife Staff should follow the PPE guidelines above when handling live high-risk species, like waterfowl or any potentially infected live or dead animals.

Disposal of Carcasses

Wearing appropriate PPE, carcasses can be collected, triple-bagged (garbage or contractor bag), and placed in an outdoor trash or dumpster for disposal. With advanced notice and permission, carcasses can be transported to the Wildlife Health Unit in Delmar or Cornell Animal Health Diagnostic Center for disposal. Please contact wildlifehealth@dec.ny.gov for inquiries about disposal at the WHU or Melissa Fadden, mf766@cornell.edu, for inquiries regarding disposal at Cornell.

Please consider the following events as high priority for carcass removal and disposal:

- Public parks or schoolyards with heavy use - coordinate with local entities
- Areas with known bald eagle congregations or nesting sites
- Situations deemed high profile by Regional Wildlife Managers due to publicity or likely media attention

Further Information:

[CDC Avian Influenza](#)

[Biosafety for Field Work](#)

[USDA Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Wild Birds-2025](#)

[USDA Backyard Poultry and Biosecurity-Defend the Flock](#)