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Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Confirmed in Southern California *San Diego Humane Society increases biosecurity measures to protect bird population*

SAN DIEGO — Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1, also known as the bird flu, [is spreading in domestic poultry and wild birds throughout the U.S. and has now been confirmed in Los Angeles and Orange Counties](#). The disease poses little risk to humans, but is highly contagious among susceptible bird species. While HPAI H5N1 has not yet been confirmed in San Diego County, San Diego Humane Society has implemented strict biosecurity procedures to provide the most compassionate care to animals in need while mitigating the spread of disease.

San Diego Humane Society's Project Wildlife program is the primary resource for wildlife rehabilitation in San Diego County. The only way for the program to remain open without spreading the virus to other animals is to limit susceptible species from entering its buildings. **"We want the community to be aware of this highly contagious bird flu, because we have to make significant changes to our intake process to prevent the disease from spreading to other animals in our care,"** said Dr. Jon Enyart, Senior Director of Project Wildlife. "We now have strict biosecurity in place for Project Wildlife facilities and are limiting admission of wild birds, as well as restricting access to authorized personnel only. We are also changing our intake process for domestic birds at San Diego Humane Society animal shelters."

Important ways the public can help prevent the spread of disease:

- **If you find an uninjured young bird, attempt to renest and reunite them with their parents** rather than bringing them to Project Wildlife. If a HPAI susceptible bird is showing signs of illness, San Diego Humane Society will perform humane euthanasia upon arrival and submit the bird to the UC Davis California Animal Health and Food Safety laboratory for testing. This will help prevent suffering and slow down the spread of the virus.
- **Do not feed or provide water to wild birds**, especially if backyard poultry or other captive birds are on the premises (e.g., chickens, turkeys, peafowl, ducks, geese, pigeons, doves). Transmission can occur among birds by drinking contaminated water.
- **Attempt to rehome healthy indoor pet birds rather than bringing them to the shelter.** If you need to give up your pet bird, San Diego Humane Society offers rehoming tools that allow you to find a new home for the bird and place them directly with their new family. In the meantime, pet birds should be restricted from interacting with any new birds and should not have outdoor exposure. If pet birds do need to come to San Diego Humane Society, they will be placed in foster care and kept away from other birds until a foster home can be found (without other birds or outdoor exposure).
- **If engaging in outdoor activity in areas with waterfowl and other waterbirds, be sure to wash clothing, and disinfect footwear and equipment, before traveling to other areas or interacting with domestic or pet birds.** Footwear and equipment may be washed with soap and water, then disinfected in household bleach diluted 1:10 with water for at least 10 minutes.
- **Do not handle sick or dead wildlife.** If it is necessary to do so, it is recommended to wear impermeable gloves and use an inverted plastic bag, shovel or other tool. Afterward, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, and change clothes before having contact with domestic or pet birds.
- **Contact the appropriate organization if you encounter sick or deceased wildlife:**
 - The public may report dead wild birds using the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) [mortality reporting form](#).
 - Sick and dead poultry may be reported to the CDFA hotline at 866-922-2473.
 - If you find live orphaned or injured wild birds, please contact San Diego Humane Society at 619-299-7012 for advice.



HPAI H5N1 is primarily a disease of poultry (chickens, turkeys) and may cause significant mortality in backyard and commercial flocks. In wild birds, infection may cause mild to severe disease, and depends in part on the species infected. **Clinical signs for avian influenza include:**

- Sudden death and increased mortality in a flock.
- Neurological signs (tremors of head and neck, inability to stand, paralysis).
- Low appetite, lethargy and diarrhea.
- Difficulty breathing, sneezing, nasal discharge and coughing.
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, neck and hocks.
- Purple discoloration of legs.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the risk to the general public's health from the current H5N1 viruses is low. HPAI strains have occasionally been reported to infect some mammal species, including pigs, cats, dogs, foxes, martens, civets, tigers and humans. Red foxes have been noted to be particularly susceptible. Some strains of HPAI, including H5N1, can cause severe respiratory disease in people, most commonly in children or older adults.

Official updates about avian flu can be found through the following websites:

- [News updates from California Department of Fish and Wildlife.](#)
- An [informational flyer](#) addressing frequently asked questions is available on [CDFW's website](#).
- National Wildlife Health Center: [Distribution of HPAI in North America, 2021/2022](#)
- USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service: [2022 Detections of HPAI](#)

For the latest information from San Diego Humane Society, visit sdhumane.org/birdflu.

About San Diego Humane Society

San Diego Humane Society's scope of social responsibility goes beyond adopting animals. We offer programs that strengthen the human-animal bond, prevent cruelty and neglect, provide medical care, educate the community and serve as a safety net for all pet families. Serving San Diego County since 1880, San Diego Humane Society has campuses in El Cajon, Escondido, Oceanside, Ramona and San Diego. For more information, please visit sdhumane.org. Follow the SDHS Media Relations department on [Twitter @sdhumane](#).

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