



H5N1 FAQs for Alaska Subsistence Hunters

Can we get avian influenza from the animals we hunt?

The chance of people getting avian influenza from hunting birds is low. To be safe hunters should take steps to protect themselves when handling and preparing wild birds.

1. **Wearing Protective Gear:** Always wear gloves when handling wild birds to prevent direct contact with bird droppings, fluids, or feathers, which may carry the virus.
2. **Minimizing Contact:** Try to avoid touching your face, especially your mouth, nose, and eyes, while handling or processing wild birds.
3. **Thorough Cooking:** Ensure that meat from wild birds is cooked thoroughly to an internal temperature of at least 165°F to kill any potential viruses and bacteria.
4. **Avoiding Sick Birds:** Do not harvest or handle wild birds that appear sick or are found dead.
5. **Hand Hygiene:** Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after handling game, carcasses, or any equipment used during hunting. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
6. **No Eating or Drinking:** Refrain from consuming food, drinks, or putting anything in your mouth while cleaning, processing, or handling birds.

Because avian influenza infection remains uncommon in mammals, the risk of H5N1 exposure while handling mammals is also lower. However, practicing proper hygiene, like wearing protective gear (e.g., gloves, mask) and washing hands thoroughly after handling potentially infected mammals, can reduce the risk. Never harvest a sick mammal or a mammal you have found dead.

What if we don't have protective gear?

If protective gear like gloves isn't available, it's crucial to avoid touching your mouth or face while handling animals. Never put any parts of the animal in your mouth. After cleaning animals, be sure to thoroughly wash your hands and knife

with soap and water. This simple hygiene practice can help reduce the risk of exposure to H5N1 and other germs.

Can we get avian influenza from berries or bird eggs?

The H5N1 virus can be shed in bird droppings, so the virus could be on the outside of eggs. However, even if a mother bird was infected, the virus is unlikely to be inside of her eggs. Washing eggs is always a good idea, and cooking eggs kills any germs that cause illness. It is also good practice to wash berries. Don't eat berries with visible bird feces or other obvious contamination without washing them.

Are our fish safe from HPAI?

Yes. Influenza viruses do not infect fish.

Can eating mammals that have eaten infected birds make us sick?

The risk of contracting H5N1 from consuming mammals that have eaten infected birds is extremely low. Although the virus could potentially survive in a mammal's digestive system if it consumes an infected bird, the likelihood of human infection through consumption is low. A case has never been identified in this way. Proper cooking also destroys the virus, further reducing the exposure risk.

What if I get sick after hunting?

If you become sick after hunting, contact your healthcare provider and let them know you were recently hunting, which animals you were exposed to, and whether any of the animals appeared sick or had an infected wound.