



# Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

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Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), also commonly known as bird flu, is present in Colorado and nationwide. Recently, it has caused outbreaks in poultry and dairy herds, resulting in the largest animal disease outbreak in the state's history.

## HPAI Overview

HPAI was first described in 1878 and is typically transmitted by wild migratory birds. A new subtype of the virus was detected in 2021 that can spread to other animals, and in some cases, humans, through direct contact with infected poultry or wild birds.

## Economic Impacts

The recent HPAI outbreak has caused significant economic loss to consumers and agriculture producers.

## Poultry

As of December 2025, the [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#) estimated that about 184 million egg-laying chickens in the U.S. have been infected with HPAI in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. In Colorado, almost 10 million birds have been infected, which is the fourth highest rate of infection in the country according to the USDA.

Preemptive culling of a flock is enforced by the USDA 24 hours after detection of HPAI to prevent rapid spread of the disease. The USDA compensates farmers for culled poultry and destroyed eggs. In 2024, the University of Arkansas estimated that HPAI caused a [\\$1.41 billion loss in consumer surplus on U.S. egg consumers](#). After the first detection of HPAI in 2022, egg production in Colorado also significantly decreased.

## Cattle

The [spillover of the virus to cattle](#) has also caused impacts to the dairy industry. Transmission is suspected from exposure to infected poultry or wild birds. Transmission can occur through consumption of raw milk or exposure to aerosols or milking equipment. HPAI in cattle can cause a decrease in consumption, respiratory symptoms, decreased milk production, abnormal milk, and increased mortality rates. While infected cattle are not typically culled to control outbreaks, milk production losses can occur. However, economic losses in the dairy industry have not been as great as the poultry industry. Commonly recommended control measures include separating poultry and cattle; separate footwear for interacting between species; disinfection of all clothing, vehicles, and equipment; and manure removal.

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## Humans

As of December 2025, [the Center for Disease Control \(CDC\) has reported](#) 71 confirmed cases of HPAI in humans with two deaths. Colorado has had ten confirmed cases: one from a dairy farm worker and nine from poultry farm workers, with no deaths reported. Although humans can contract HPAI from direct contact with infected animals, there has been no reports of human-to-human transmission, and the CDC says the current public health risk of HPAI is low.

## Resources for Producers

The federal government and the state of Colorado have employed several measures to prevent the spread of HPAI and compensate producers for losses. The USDA offers the following resources:

- [two voluntary biosecurity assessments](#) to identify actionable strategies to strengthen facilities against HPAI, including sharing up to 75 percent of costs;
- mandatory audits before restocking poultry flocks after an outbreak; and
- [compensation](#) for birds and eggs that are depopulated or destroyed and [compensation](#) for dairy milk production losses.

Additionally, the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service restricts bird imports, tests imported birds, conducts surveillance in domestic poultry, and [surveys](#)

[wild waterfowl for HPAI](#). For cattle, the USDA conducts a [National Milk Testing Strategy](#) and offers biosecurity guidance and trainings.

The [USDA is also investing \\$100 million](#) in advanced prevention, therapeutics, vaccine development, and general research for HPAI.

## Response Efforts in Colorado

In 2023, the General Assembly passed [House Bill 23-1264](#), which removed the requirement that inspection, testing, and quarantine of livestock occur pursuant to rules issued by the Commissioner of Agriculture. This was done in an effort to expedite the Department of Agriculture's (CDA) response to disease outbreaks. CDA collaborates with federal, state, and local partners to respond to outbreaks in livestock and the State Veterinarian oversees much of this response. Other efforts focused on the recent [HPAI outbreak](#) include [dairy tank testing](#) and updates to the [Colorado Secure Food Supply Plan](#).

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment also offers resources, including up to [four weeks of free PPE](#) for animal facility workers.