

Press Releases

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Connecticut health and agriculture officials say the risk of avian flu in Connecticut is low

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HARTFORD, Conn—Despite the first human case of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) virus which was reported in Texas over the weekend in a person exposed to an infected dairy cow, officials from the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAg) say there are no cases reported in any cattle or other livestock in Connecticut.

The patient in Texas—who experienced eye inflammation as their only symptom and is clinically improving—was tested for flu late last week with confirmatory testing performed by the CDC over the weekend. The patient is being treated with the antiviral drug Oseltamivir, and the case does not change the risk to the general public, which remains low. Additionally, officials stress the state’s commercial milk supply is safe, due to the pasteurization process which is required for interstate commerce.

According to CDC’s interim recommendations, people should avoid unprotected exposures to sick or dead animals including wild birds, poultry, other domesticated birds, and other wild or domesticated animals (including cattle), as well as with animal carcasses, raw milk, feces, litter, or materials contaminated by birds or other animals with confirmed or suspected HPAI A(H5N1)-virus infection.

People should not prepare or eat uncooked or undercooked food or related uncooked food products, such as unpasteurized (raw) milk, or products made from raw milk, such as cheeses from animals with confirmed or suspected HPAI A(H5N1)-virus infection (avian influenza or bird flu).

“This is an evolving situation in Texas. The current risk of infection from avian influenza to residents of Connecticut remains low. Because pasteurization kills pathogens, including avian influenza, in milk, residents of Connecticut should be reassured by the safety of drinking or eating pasteurized dairy products. While we have no evidence of human-to-human transmission at this time, we need to remain vigilant,” said DPH Commissioner Manisha Juthani, MD.

Commissioner Juthani added that while seasonal flu vaccines do not provide protection against HPAI A(H5N1)-virus infection, the CDC is working with state health departments to continue to monitor workers who may have been in contact with infected or potentially infected birds/animals and test those people who develop symptoms. CDC also has guidance for clinicians on monitoring, testing, and antiviral treatment for patients with suspected or confirmed avian influenza A virus infections. According to the CDC, this is the second human case of H5N1 flu in the United States and the first linked to an exposure to cattle.

On March 25, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and the CDC confirmed positive test results for highly pathogenic avian influenza in Texas and Kansas dairy herds.

Based on the information and research available, there is no concern about the safety of the commercial milk supply or that this circumstance poses a risk to consumer health. Dairies are required to send only milk from healthy animals into processing for human consumption, and milk from affected animals is not entering the food supply. Pasteurization has continually proven to inactivate bacteria and viruses, like influenza, in milk.

“At this time, there are no confirmed cases of H5N1 in dairy cattle or other livestock in Connecticut. We are monitoring this situation as it evolves nationally and continue to amplify the information shared from federal partners on a local level,” said Connecticut DoAg Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt. “We encourage Connecticut producers to enhance their on-farm biosecurity measures for the health and safety of livestock and farm workers.”

In addition to enhancing biosecurity, Commissioner Hurlburt added that producers and veterinarians should report cases of sick cattle to State Animal Health Officials at 860-713-2505 or ctstate.vet@ct.gov.