



Office of  
**INDIANA STATE CHEMIST AND SEED COMMISSIONER**

*Protecting Indiana's Agriculture and Environment - Feed, Fertilizer, Hemp, Pesticide and Seed*

Purdue University • 175 South University Street  
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2063  
Telephone (765) 494-1492 • Facsimile (765) 494-4331  
oisc.purdue.edu

Mark LeBlanc, Ph.D.  
State Chemist &  
Seed Commissioner

We are writing to bring your attention to a critical issue related to highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI, or bird flu) and its impact on raw milk. Recent incidents have highlighted the dangers posed by contaminated milk, especially for our feline companions.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) have confirmed the detection of HPAI A (H5N1) viruses in several dairy herds across multiple states, including Michigan, Ohio, North Carolina, and Texas<sup>1</sup>.

### **1. Avian Influenza in Raw Milk:**

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported a concerning development: cats that consumed raw milk from cows infected with highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 suffered severe consequences<sup>2</sup>.
- Avian influenza is a highly contagious viral disease primarily affecting birds, but it can also pose risks to humans and animals<sup>3</sup>

### **2. Cat Fatalities:**

- Cats consuming HPAI-infected milk have been infected and have died in Ohio, New Mexico, and Texas<sup>4</sup>.
- More than half of the cats died, exhibiting no apparent signs of injury<sup>2</sup>.
- Autopsies revealed severe systemic virus infection, affecting organs such as the brain and eyes<sup>2</sup>.

### **3. Pet Safety Recommendations:**

- **Be cautious about feeding raw milk to pets**, especially if it comes from cows that have not been tested for avian influenza.
- If you suspect your pet has consumed contaminated milk, seek veterinary assistance promptly.
- In addition to birds and poultry, the USDA has found H5N1 in more than 200 wild mammals<sup>5</sup>. Cats are particularly susceptible to the disease.

### **4. Animal Food Distributors:**

- It is your responsibility to ensure animal food distributed is safe. Distributing an animal food that may cause injury to health or from a diseased animal is adulteration<sup>6</sup>. Knowingly distributing adulterated animal food is a prohibited act<sup>7</sup>.
- Pasteurization remains a crucial step in ensuring milk safety. While the FDA has found HPAI viral fragments in approximately 20% of retail milk, pasteurization appears to effectively kill the virus<sup>8</sup>.

- The FDA is recommending that industry not manufacture or sell raw milk or raw milk cheese products made from cows showing symptoms of illness, or cows that might have been exposed to avian influenza viruses<sup>9</sup>.

## 5. Reporting Suspected Cases:

- If you observe symptoms in birds or suspect avian influenza contamination in raw milk, report it to your herd veterinarian or the [Indiana State Board of Animal Health \(BOAH\)](#)<sup>10</sup>.
- BOAH continues to monitor HPAI in Indiana and posts information, updates, and resources for those concerned with HPAI in their flocks and herds.
- National updates about H5N1 in poultry, birds, cattle, and humans are available from the CDC<sup>8</sup>.

## 5. Testing Cattle:

- You may consider testing your cattle to determine their HPAI before selling milk. (Be aware: A test is valid only as of the time the sample was collected; a negative test cannot be relied upon as a one-and-done clearance.)
- Samples may be collected and submitted by an accredited veterinarian or a designated sample collector who is collecting under the indirect supervision of a veterinarian<sup>11</sup>.
- USDA is covering the cost of HPAI laboratory tests performed at a National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) facility. The [Indiana Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at Purdue University operates in the NAHLN network](#)<sup>12</sup>. Other, associated veterinary fees and shipping charges are the responsibility of the producer.

We urge you to share this information with your friends, family, and pet owners. Let us prioritize food safety and protect our beloved pets from unnecessary risks.

Sincerely,

**Trish Dunn**

*Feed Administrator, Office of Indiana State Chemist*

## References:

1. [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Detections in Livestock](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/livestock)
  - <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/livestock>
2. [More than half of cats died after drinking raw milk from bird flu-infected cows](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cats-died-after-drinking-milk-bird-flu-infected-cows/)
  - <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cats-died-after-drinking-milk-bird-flu-infected-cows/>
3. [Cats suffer H5N1 brain infections, blindness, death after drinking raw milk](https://arstechnica.com/science/2024/04/concerning-spread-of-bird-flu-from-cows-to-cats-suspected-in-texas/)
  - <https://arstechnica.com/science/2024/04/concerning-spread-of-bird-flu-from-cows-to-cats-suspected-in-texas/>
4. [Diligent detective work leads to discovery of HPAI in dairy cattle](https://www.avma.org/news/diligent-detective-work-leads-discovery-hpai-dairy-cattle)
  - <https://www.avma.org/news/diligent-detective-work-leads-discovery-hpai-dairy-cattle>
5. [Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Mammals](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/mammals)
  - <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/mammals>
6. [Indiana Code 15-19-7-29 Adulteration of Commercial Feed](https://iga.in.gov/laws/2023/ic/titles/15#15-19-7-29)
  - <https://iga.in.gov/laws/2023/ic/titles/15#15-19-7-29>

7. [Indiana Code 15-19-7-40 Prohibited Acts](#)
  - <https://iga.in.gov/laws/2023/ic/titles/15#15-19-7-40>
8. [Updates on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\)](#)
  - <https://www.fda.gov/food/alerts-advisories-safety-information/updates-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-hpai>
9. [Questions and Answers Regarding Milk Safety During Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) Outbreaks](#)
  - <https://www.fda.gov/food/milk-guidance-documents-regulatory-information/questions-and-answers-regarding-milk-safety-during-highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-hpai-outbreaks#:~:text=Because%20of%20the%20limited%20information,those%20infected%20with%20avian%20influenza>
10. [H5N1 Bird Flu: Current Situation Summary](#)
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-flu-summary.htm>
11. [Sampling Guidance for HPAI Testing](#)
  - <https://www.in.gov/boah/files/IN-BOAH-Sampling-Guidance-HPAI-Livestock-05.01.24.pdf>
12. [ADDL Guidance for HPAI Laboratory Submissions](#)
  - <https://vet.purdue.edu/addl/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-livestock.php>