



Testing for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Cattle

Guidance for Producers

This document provides guidance on testing for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in cattle. As part of a [national initiative](#), lead by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), testing is available at the BC [Animal Health Center](#) (AHC) for **healthy** cattle. The purpose of offering testing for healthy cattle is to facilitate enhanced industry biosecurity efforts.

If a producer **notices illness** in their cattle that could be HPAI, they are required to contact their herd veterinarian, who will then do an evaluation. If the veterinarian is concerned about HPAI, they will then notify the local [CFIA district office](#) and the [Office of the Chief Veterinarian](#) promptly.

Why test healthy cattle?

Testing clinically healthy animals provides another tool that producers can use to reduce risk of introducing HPAI into their herds. Evidence to date shows that udder-to-udder transmission seems to be the most common mechanism for disease spread, indicating that testing lactating animals, especially pre-movement, is of highest value in reducing between-farm disease transmission risk. Testing costs are covered by the CFIA, so producers will not be charged for laboratory fees. Producers are still responsible for veterinary and courier fees.

We recommend that producers speak to their herd veterinarian before submitting any samples for HPAI testing. In BC, food animal veterinarians have received a very detailed document about HPAI testing in cattle.

In instances where testing is not implemented, it is recommended to enhance transportation and [on-farm biosecurity measures](#) to minimize disease spread.

What does a negative test result mean?

The HPAI test is a PCR (polymerase chain reaction). A negative test indicates no detection of influenza A virus in the sample.

- A negative test on a healthy cow typically means no HPAI infection.

Rarely, a false negative result occurs when the cow is infected, but HPAI is not detected by the test. This can happen if the cow is not yet shedding high levels of HPAI, for instance if the cow was infected very recently. This can also happen if the sample is contaminated, or if the sample is too diluted.

Ministry of Agriculture and Food
Office of the Chief Veterinarian &
Animal Health Center

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1767 Angus Campbell Rd
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Toll Free: 1-800-661-9903

Web Address:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/animals-and-crops/animal-health/office-of-the-chief-veterinarian>



What will happen if the test comes back positive?

HPAI in cattle does not impact animal health in the same manner as with domestic poultry. While HPAI spreads rapidly between birds and results in high mortality rates; cattle typically exhibit milder signs, with only a small proportion of the herd affected. Therefore, the regulatory response to HPAI detection differs between the two industries.

Animal health

- All results that are positive at AHC will be reported to CFIA and the BC Office of the Chief Veterinarian. The samples will be forwarded to the National Centre for Foreign Animal Disease (NCFAD) for confirmatory testing.
- The Chief Veterinarian may disclose the farm identity and location to other parties (e.g. BCDA, MMB, milk, feed, animal transporters) and instruct those parties to take actions to reduce risk of disease spread.
- Cattle herds with a positive test result may undergo a disease investigation including trace out to other herds that have shipped or received animals from the herd with the positive test. The disease investigation may lead to regulatory action, including quarantining of the herd(s) for up to 30 days after clinical signs in all cattle have resolved.
- **Impacted herds will be able to continue to ship milk from healthy animals.**
- Further guidance will be made, and may include:
 - To take specific measures to segregate animals known to be actively infected with HPAI, or with abnormal milk or with other signs compatible with HPAI, to minimize the risk of cow-to-cow spread.
 - To test any animals with signs compatible with HPAI that have not been tested.
 - To stop cattle movements on and off the farm for a period of up to 30 days.
 - To implement enhanced cleaning and disinfection of equipment and vehicles.
 - To ensure raw milk from cows known to be actively infected with HPAI, as well as cows with abnormal milk or with other signs compatible with HPAI, is discarded and not consumed by people or other animals (including wildlife).
 - To report illness in cattle, cats, dogs, and other animals, including wildlife.
 - To ensure farm workers wear personal protective equipment (gloves, mask, eye protection, separate coveralls) when handling infected or potentially infected cattle, raw milk, or milking equipment.



Public health and food safety

- The Chief Veterinarian will report positive results to public health officials and they will contact the producer to assess human exposure to avian influenza on the farm (see human health considerations below). To assist with public health follow up, producers should be ready to share a log of who visits the farm and when they were there, as well as biosecurity and farm entry SOPs.
- Public health will follow up to provide:
 - Risk assessment of exposed individuals based on the nature of exposure, personal protective measures, presence of any flu-like symptoms, and seasonal influenza vaccination status
 - Guidance to exposed individuals regarding symptom monitoring, testing and treatment, including antiviral prophylaxis
 - Guidance [to contact a physician if they experience any flu-like symptoms](#) and let them know about the exposure to avian influenza virus.

What are human health considerations?

- While rare, avian influenza virus can also infect people and can cause severe illness. Further, influenza viruses are adaptable and can change markedly when strains from humans or different animal species mix and exchange genetic information. Therefore, it is important to promptly detect avian influenza infection in people, minimize co-infections of human and avian influenza viruses, and monitor for any further transmission.

More Information

[Highly pathogenic avian influenza \(HPAI\) in livestock - Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(canada.ca\)](#)

[Guidance on human health issues related to avian influenza in Canada - Canada.ca](#)
[CCOHS: How to Protect Yourself from Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) at Work](#)

[Avian influenza - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)

If you are a producer and require more information, please reach out to your veterinarian. Alternatively, you may contact the Animal Health Center Laboratory at 604 556-3003 or 1-800-661-9903.

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