HPAI – Frequently Asked Questions – Updated October 15, 2026

General Questions about HPAI (H5N1)

Is HPAI a new virus?

HPAI was first detected in Canadian poultry flocks in December 2021. It was detected in U.S. dairy cattle in March 2024. Recently, HPAI was detected in 2 dairy herds in south Washington.

How did dairy cattle in the US contract HPAI?

According to the USDA, wild migratory birds are believed to be the original source of the virus. However, the virus is known to have spread in cattle due to movement between herds. Additionally, their investigation indicates the virus also spread from dairy cattle back into nearby poultry premises through an unknown route.

Will the border be closed?

The border remains open to cattle movements between the United States and Canada. However, all lactating dairy cattle require a negative HPAI test result before entering Canada.

How is HPAI spread?

HPAI can be spread through multiple avenues that include, but not limited to:

1) Direct contact between an infected animal and healthy animals or farm personnel through:
    - Introduction of asymptomatic animals into a healthy herd.
    - Introduction of symptomatic animals into a healthy herd.
    - Human exposure to raw milk, urine, mucous, or other fluids from infected animals.
2) Exposure to raw milk which is known to have high concentrations of the virus in both asymptomatic and symptomatic cattle.
    - Anyone handling raw milk from herds with positive cases of HPAI should do so with caution and wear the appropriate PPE.
    - Infected animals should be milked last to reduce the risk of exposing healthy cows to the virus via soiled milking claws.
    - The virus has been shown to survive on stainless steel surfaces for up to 5 hours after exposure. Additional cleaning in areas exposed to milk (i.e. parlours, robots, milk houses, etc.) with a disinfectant is recommended.
3) Indirect exposure to the virus via contaminated equipment, vehicles, or personnel.

Key findings identified from the Michigan Dairy Herd and Poultry Flock Summary identified the potential risk factors for transmission:

- HPAI virus was detected at high levels in milk from infected cows, and at lower levels in nasal swabs and urine of infected cows.
- Shared personnel between premises.
- Shared vehicles between premises.
- Frequent visitors on/off premises.
    - Service providers, veterinarians, and milk haulers

- Deadstock removal

Is HPAI a reportable disease?

HPAI is a reportable disease in Canada. This means that any person suspecting a case of HPAI in an animal, whether poultry or livestock, must report it to the CFIA. Confirmed and probable human cases are also reportable to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

What are the symptoms of HPAI in cattle?

Cattle can be asymptomatic and symptomatic when infected with HPAI. Lactating cows that are symptomatic can have abnormal, thick colostrum-like milk, have decreased milk production, fever, lethargy, constipation, dehydration, and nasal discharge. Dry cows and youngstock can present with fever, lethargy, constipation, dehydration, and nasal discharge.

Cows can be infected with HPAI for as long as two weeks before they show any clinical signs. If animals in your herd test positive for the virus, it is safer to assume every cow carries the virus and plan accordingly by implementing strong biosecurity practices and providing adequate PPE.

What should I do if I suspect HPAI infected animals in my herd?

If you observe animals in your herd with symptoms consistent with HPAI, you should contact your herd veterinarian immediately.

Where and how can I test my herd for HPAI?

Testing is conducted through the Animal Health Center at the BC Ministry of Agriculture.

Milk testing for HPAI is available for lactating dairy cows and for bulk tank milk

Nasal swabs can be used to test non-lactating animals, and it is recommended to nasal swab test multiple animals within a group.

How long do clinical signs in dairy cattle last?

The clinical signs observed in dairy cattle are relatively mild, and infected animals will start to improve over four to seven days.

Can I treat HPAI with antibiotics?

HPAI is a virus and therefore cannot be treated with antibiotics. Animals should be offered supportive treatment as recommended by your veterinarian.

Does HPAI have a high mortality rate?

According to U.S. data, most affected animals reportedly recovered with supportive treatment, and the mortality/culling rate has been low at 2% or less.

Can I continue to drink the raw milk from my bulk tank if my herd is HPAI positive?

No. The virus can be highly concentrated in raw milk. Raw milk should be pasteurized first before being consumed by humans, fed to calves, or other farm animals including cats and dogs.

How is the HPAI virus killed?

Heat treatment or pasteurization is the best option for deactivating the virus in raw milk. Raw milk should be heated to 63°C for 30 minutes, or 72°C for 15 seconds.

Refer to the ***Recommendations for Waste Milk Disposal*** (see below for link) for more information on pasteurizing milk.

If my herd tests positive for HPAI, how long do I have to quarantine for?

If you suspect you may have HPAI in your herd, you should initiate a voluntary quarantine until test results confirm your herd is positive. Once confirmed positive, the quarantine period will last a minimum of 30 days after the herd no longer shows clinical signs of illness, OR, if the herd shows no signs of illness and bulk tank milk testing results are negative for 3 consecutive tests.

What are the quarantine requirements?

- No movement of cattle on or off the premises.
- Authorized movement of a limited number of animals during the quarantine period may be permitted on a case-by-case basis by the Office of the Chief Veterinarian.
- Enhanced biosecurity and cleaning procedures for visitors, service providers, and vehicles entering and leaving the premises.

Can I transport animals off my premises if my herd is HPAI positive (4H calves, cull cows, bull calves, etc.)?

Authorized movements of animals off the premises may be granted by the Office of the Chief Veterinarian. Cull cows must pass inspection and be clinically healthy, and be transported directly to their final destination (i.e. they cannot pass through assembly yards or be sold at auction)

Bull calves and dairy-beef cross calves are not permitted to leave the premise.

Show cows and 4H calves are not permitted to leave the premises to attend shows.

Can I do farm tours if my farm is negative for HPAI?

It is strongly recommended to reduce the number of non-essential visitors to your farm. Ensure non-essential visitors have not been on other dairy farms for a minimum of 48 hours. Limit animal contact to essential personnel. Provide clean clothing and footwear or disposable boot covers. Encourage handwashing and provide gloves.

If HPAI cases are confirmed in the province, farm tours should cease.

Can I continue to ship milk if my farm tests positive for HPAI?

Pasteurization deactivates the HPAI virus, therefore, producers who are confirmed positive for HPAI can continue to ship milk. However, producers must meet biosecurity requirements to reduce the risk of spreading HPAI to other farms and to keep milk truck drivers safe.

Who is informed if I test positive for HPAI?

If your farm tests positive for HPAI, the CFIA and BC Ministry of Agriculture will inform the Public Health Authority and the BC Center for Disease Control. In addition, the BC Milk Marketing Board

and your milk transport company will be notified so that additional precautions can be taken to reduce the risk of spreading HPAI to other farms or to humans.

I think my neighbour may have HPAI in their herd. What should I do?

You can report dead or sick birds or animals to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

What can I do to reduce the risk of getting HPAI on my farm?

Reducing or eliminating the risk factors associated with the spread of HPAI can help you protect your farm.

1) Animal testing – before bringing animals onto your farm, test them for HPAI.
2) Isolate new animals for 30 days before introducing them to your herd.
3) Increase biosecurity protocols:
    - Require all visitors to wash their hands and use a boot wash station
    - Require vehicles to clean and decontaminate before entering your farmyard
    - Keep a visitor's log

Who else has received the guidance documents?

The guidance documents shared with producers have also been provided to service providers.

Human Health

Can humans get HPAI from dairy cows?

HPAI can spread to humans via bodily fluids, mucous, and raw milk from infected cows. Urine can also have low levels of the HPAI virus.

When working with infected animals, ensure that employees have adequate PPE to protect them from exposure to the virus. Ensure that employees do not touch their eyes, nose, mouth, or face.

Avian flu: How can I protect myself? (bccdc.ca)

What are human symptoms of HPAI?

Human symptoms are consistent with regular flu-like illness. Symptoms include fever, headache, muscle pain, runny nose, sore throat, feeling very tired, cough, or irritated eyes. Farm workers in the U.S. who have tested positive for HPAI have had conjunctivitis (pink eye), likely due to splashing infected material into their eye, or touching their contaminated hands to their face.

After exposure to a sick or dead animal, watch for symptoms for 10 days. If you feel sick, contact your health care provider. Stay home and away from others until 24 hours after your symptoms are gone. Wear a mask and wash your hands often if you are around other people.

What Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is recommended?

Based on how HPAI can spread to humans the following PPE is recommended:

- Safety glasses
- Disposable gloves

- Medical mask or N95 mask
- Protective clothing such as disposable coveralls or aprons
- Rubber boots or disposable boot covers

Avian Influenza (AI) Personal Protective Equipment | AgSafe (agsafebc.ca)

Are there risks associated with shared employees or cohabitating employees?

Sharing employees between farms is a risk factor for spreading HPAI between farms. Discontinue this practice where possible; alternatively, enhance biosecurity protocols to reduce the risk of spreading HPAI due to contaminated clothing, footwear, vehicles, etc.

HPAI can spread between people, so there is a risk of spreading between those that live together and further spread to different farms.

One of my employees is sick, do they need to go to the doctor?

If your employee has flu-like symptoms they should contact their health care provider and advise them that they have been in contact with animals and are concerned about avian influenza.

Can a sick employee spread HPAI to my cows?

The major links between infected dairy premises in the U.S., and between dairy and poultry premises, are indirect from shared people, vehicles, and equipment. An individual with flu-like symptoms could make a cow sick, but the level of risk is currently unknown.

Animal Health and Testing

What are the mandatory testing requirements for dairy cattle in BC?

Currently, they are no testing requirements for dairy cattle in BC. Dairy animals can be moved on and off your premises with no restrictions UNLESS your herd has tested positive for HPAI.

Is any testing being done to monitor for HPAI?

Currently, HPAI surveillance is being conducted using a risk-based approach. Dairy farmers in the Fraser Valley are having their bulk tank milk tested via load samples taken from each milk route, once per week. All other testing for HPAI is voluntary and for surveillance purposes only. If you would like to submit milk samples for HPAI testing to the Animal Health Center, please contact your herd veterinarian or the Office of the Chief Veterinarian for guidance.

What kind of tests are available for my herd?

To test for HPAI in your herd, milk samples can be collected from lactating cows or the bulk tank. Non-lactating animals can have nasal swabs taken for testing, and it is recommended to nasal swab test multiple animals within a group. However, testing non-lactating animals may not be reliable if they are not showing signs of HPAI. Quarantining the animal(s) you suspect to have HPAI for 30 days is recommended to reduce risk.

Where can my veterinarian submit my samples for HPAI testing?

Samples for HPAI testing can be submitted through the Animal Health Center at the BC Ministry of Agriculture.

How much does it cost to test milk samples for HPAI?

The CFIA is covering some testing costs, so producers will not be charged for laboratory testing. Load sample surveillance for milk routes is being covered by the Ministry of Agriculture.

What is the difference between a positive vs confirmatory test?

The initial testing for HPAI occurs in Abbotsford at the Ministry of Agriculture's Animal Health Center. If the milk sample tests positive, it is sent to the CFIA lab in Winnipeg for confirmatory testing. A positive test at the BC Ministry of Agriculture lab initiates the milk pick-up and on-farm requirements and protocols as outlined in the ***Producer Guidance Document for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza***.

Testing Positive for HPAI

Can I continue to ship milk if my herd tests positive?

If your herd tests positive for HPAI your farm will still be able to ship milk from healthy animals. Cows that have symptoms of HPAI must have their milk diverted to waste milk. To qualify for milk pick-up, your farm must establish a biosecurity plan and meet the requirements for milk pick-up.

Who is notified when my herd tests positive?

If your milk samples test positive for HPAI your farm will be added to the "Active" HPAI list that is circulated to the BC Milk Marketing Board, Public Health, and milk transport to ensure that the appropriate steps can be taken to reduce the risk of HPAI spreading from your farm to another farm, and to help keep your staff and milk truck driver healthy.

You will be contacted by your Regional Public Health Authority to discuss HPAI in the context of human health safety and risks of exposure.

Why do I need to have a biosecurity plan to qualify for milk pick-up?

Although HPAI does not pose a great risk to dairy cattle, risks for other livestock such a poultry and for humans remain a concern. Dairy producers are fortunate that HPAI is not fatal to cows like it is for poultry, but due diligence is needed to reduce the risk of HPAI spreading to poultry farms from infected dairy farms.

In addition, HPAI poses a risk to human health, so steps must be taken on farm to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus. Raw milk from infected herds can be highly concentrated with the virus which increases the risk of exposure to employees working with raw milk (i.e. during milking), and to milk truck drivers during milk pick-up.

Who is responsible for providing PPE?

Personal protective equipment required for milk pick-up must be provided by the producer. PPE for milk pick-up includes:

- Safety goggles (disposable or reusable) or face shield
- Medical mask
- Disposable Boot covers
- Disposable coveralls
- Disposable gloves

It is also highly recommended to provide PPE to employees working closely with animals and during milking to reduce the risk of exposure.

Biosecurity

Are there resources for developing a biosecurity plan for my farm?

Please refer to the Biosecurity for Canadian Dairy Farms: National Standards Guide developed by DFC for more resources for developing a biosecurity plan.

What is the Controlled Access Zone (CAZ)?

The CAZ is a designated area in which biosecurity protocols are in place and monitored, and within which livestock are managed. The CAZ is accessible to people, equipment, vehicles, and livestock only through a controlled access point.

The CAZ typically encompasses the areas on the farm that are considered lower risk for disease transmission. The CAZ area can include the driveway, parking areas, and storage sheds that are accessible with relatively little to no risk of cross-contamination between animal housing, manure storage, and other areas on the farm within the "Restricted Access Zone".

What is the Restricted Access Zone (RAZ)?

The RAZ is an area inside the controlled access zone where animals are housed and where access by people and equipment is further limited.

The RAZ contains the high-risk areas on the farm including the animal housing (barn, calf hutches, maternity pen, etc.), as well as pasture areas and manure storage. Access to the RAZ should be prohibited unless there is a legitimate and agreed reason for access.

What is the line of separation (LOS)?

The Line of Separation (LOS) zone encompasses the "Controlled Access Zone" and the "Restricted Access Zone" and has access points to control the entry and exit of vehicles and personnel. The access point(s) should contain a cleaning and decontaminating station (C&D) and an area where employees and service providers entering the RAZ can collect PPE as required by the farm's biosecurity protocol. Milk truck drivers must be provided PPE to conduct milk pick-up safely due to the high concentrations of HPAI found in raw milk.

In some cases, the LOS may pass through, not encompass, the entirety of the CAZ. This is to accommodate a more strategic location for the C&D station. For example, if your farm has a long driveway, the water source for the C&D station may be closer to the farmyard than at the end of the driveway.

What is the Cleaning and Decontamination Station (C&D)?

The C&D station is located at the main CAZ transition point and contains the necessary equipment and supplies for cleaning and decontaminating vehicles entering and exiting the premises. A pressurized water source needs to be provided to adequately remove soil, dirt, etc., from the tires and undercarriage of the vehicles entering. Once cleaned, use an approved disinfectant to decontaminate the tires and undercarriage of the vehicle.

The C&D will also serve as an area where visitors can clean their footwear, wash their hands, and collect any PPE that they will require while visiting the farm. For visitors accessing the CAZ only, they may only be required to wash their boots (or collect boot covers) and wash their hands. For visitors accessing the RAZ, additional PPE such as disposable coveralls, gloves, safety goggles, and protective masks may be required.

What equipment needs to be decontaminated at the CAZ transition point?

Any equipment entering and exiting the farm should be cleaned and decontaminated at the CAZ access point where the C&D station is set-up. Equipment and vehicles can be contaminated with soils, debris, raw milk, etc., that have been exposed to the HPAI virus. C&D processes for equipment and vehicles are important for reducing the spread of HPAI.

I have custom cropping or manure hauling completed on my farm, does this equipment need to be C&D every time it accesses my farmyard?

Yes. It is important to C&D this equipment each time it enters or exits your premises to reduce the risk of HPAI spreading to your farm, but also from your farm to other premises.

I have a washroom in my barn with handwashing facilities, do I need to have handwashing facilities in the milk house?

During milk pick-up, the truck driver (BTMG) must reduce their on-farm footprint as much as possible and maintain cleanliness to reduce the risk of cross-contamination. A handwashing sink is essential for the driver to achieve this. Leaving the milk house to access the handwashing facilities in a different area of the barn exposes the BTMG to a different environment and increases the risk of cross-contamination, especially if areas outside the milk house are not adequately maintained.

Why do I need a visitor's log?

A visitor's log must be maintained for traceability purposes. In the event that your farm tests positive for HPAI, it is important to know who has been visiting the farm and their potential level of exposure to the virus. The Ministry of Agriculture, the CFIA, and Public Health will request your visitors log during their follow-ups.

Milk Pick-Up

Am I responsible for providing the milk truck driver (BTMG) with PPE?

Personal protective equipment required for milk pick-up must be provided by the producer. PPE for milk pick-up includes:

- Safety goggles (disposable or reusable) or face shield

- Medical mask
- Disposable Boot covers
- Disposable coveralls
- Disposable gloves

PPE should be provided to the BTMG at the C&D station to be donned when the truck arrives at the milk house. BTMGs will don the PPE at the milk house once they have exited their milk truck. The milk truck driver is not authorized to re-enter their milk truck until pick-up is complete. Once milk transfer is complete, the BTMG will dispose of the PPE outside the milk house (please provide garbage cans for this purpose) before getting back into their milk truck. The BTMG will then proceed to the main CAZ transition point / C&D station to clean and decontaminate the milk truck before driving to their next farm.

What are the risks of the BTMG contaminating my milk sample with their equipment?

BTMG's carry 200ppm sanitizer with them on their trucks to maintain the cleanliness of their equipment. The sanitizer is used to clean any equipment, including the milk transfer hose, that can become soiled during milk pick-up procedures. Consider providing additional disinfectant at the milk house that BTMGs can use for their equipment.

Additional details can be found here: Biosecurity Requirements for Milk Pick-Up.

Surplus and Waste Milk Management

If my herd tests positive, can I still feed raw milk from healthy cows to my calves?

Dairy animals can be asymptomatic and test positive for HPAI; therefore, it is recommended to treat every cow in the herd as if she was positive. Raw milk from infected herds can be highly concentrated with the HPAI virus and should be pasteurized before it is fed to calves or discarded.

Can I feed raw milk to my barn dogs and cats?

Raw milk should not be fed to barn dogs or cats. Dogs and cats are susceptible to avian influenza and can spread the virus throughout the premises. Cats and dogs with HPAI may exhibit symptoms such as neurological distress, respiratory distress, lethargy, and loss of appetite. It can be fatal in some cases. More information on animals that are susceptible to HPAI can be found here.

How do I dispose of the waste raw milk from my sick cows?

Raw milk from sick cows should be handled with care and disposed of into the manure pit or lagoon. It is highly recommended to heat treat/pasteurise the raw milk before disposal to eliminate the risk of exposing wildlife to the virus.

For more information on disposal see Recommendations for Waste Milk Disposal.

Considerations for Other Livestock and Wildlife

Can HPAI spread from cows to poultry?

Yes. The HPAI virus can spread to poultry from infected dairy cattle. The HPAI virus is fatal to poultry, so producers are asked to do their due diligence in preventing the spread of HPAI from their dairy premises to nearby poultry operations.

What if I also have poultry?

HPAI is fatal to poultry and your biosecurity plan should include protocols for reducing the risk of spreading HPAI to your flock. For example, backyard flocks should be contained and personnel caring for the flock should be following biosecurity protocols before and after exposure to the birds, and if possible, eliminate any contact with the dairy herd.

If possible, do not share employees between the dairy operation and the poultry operation.

What if I share staff between farms?

Avoid sharing staff between farms. If staff are shared between farms, it is important to emphasise how critical the role of biosecurity protocols play in reducing the risk of HPAI spread. Employees should change clothing, decontaminant footwear or change footwear, and wash their hands, before entering another premise.