

# Benton-Franklin Health District

Media Release

Benton-Franklin  
Health District  
[www.bfhd.wa.gov](http://www.bfhd.wa.gov)

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## Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) is a Very Low Risk to the Public

Benton-Franklin Health District is assisting Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and monitoring people who were potentially exposed to bird flu at a poultry farm in Washington

**DECEMBER 14, 2022**

KENNEWICK — This afternoon the Washington Department of Agriculture (WSDA), reported the first "presumptive positive" case of avian influenza in a large commercial flock in Washington state. The investigation began late last week. Officials with WSDA expect to receive confirmatory results from the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) this week.

### VERY LOW HEALTH RISK

The current risk of being infected with avian influenza for the general public is considered extremely low. The type of bird flu that is currently spreading among wild birds and domestic poultry in the U.S. has only been identified in only one person who had close contact with infected birds. "There have been no cases of avian influenza identified in humans in Washington state," said Hannah Schnitzler, communicable disease epidemiologist with Washington State Department of Health (DOH).

### BFHD PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES

Benton-Franklin Health District (BFHD) has been contacting all employees and staff at the facility who have handled the birds to watch for illness and provide resources such as medication and influenza (flu) testing if needed.

Due to the high level of respiratory infections (RSV, flu and COVID-19) in our community and the potential to be infected with multiple viruses, BFHD is being vigilant and offering a proactive approach to help keep potentially exposed employees stay healthy. There are no reportable illnesses at this time.

### WSDA UPDATE

WSDA reports that they have "quarantined the affected premises to prevent the spread of disease. Rapid, humane euthanasia of all birds on the premises is critical to contain the outbreak. Poultry products from the flock will not enter the food supply system." Thousands of birds in the commercial flock have been impacted. The owner of the company is highly involved and is working alongside the WSDA and BFHD to help keep all employees safe and healthy. The team is devastated by the loss of animal life.

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District Website  
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Washington Department  
of Health  
[www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov)

Centers for Disease  
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[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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## ABOUT 'BIRD FLU'

Avian influenza (bird flu) is a disease similar to the flu (H1N1) and it naturally occurs in wild birds worldwide. This virus can also infect other wild birds, poultry (chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, ducks, geese, guinea fowl), and occasionally mammals. The virus spreads among birds through contact with saliva, nasal secretions, feces, or surfaces that are contaminated with the virus. On rare occasions, some bird flu viruses have infected people who have had close contact with infected birds.

## SURROUNDING POULTRY FARMS

All poultry growers, operators, and owners, including those who manage domestic backyard flocks in the surrounding areas, should remain vigilant for signs of avian influenza that most commonly spreads through contact with wild birds.

State and federal animal health officials monitor commercial flocks within a 10-kilometer area (a little more than six miles) around the infected site for influenza symptoms. Domestic flock owners in the controlled area are encouraged to self-report any illness or deaths among their birds through the WSDA [online surveillance self-reporting tool](#). For more information about avian influenza in domestic poultry in Washington, visit [Avian Influenza | Washington State Department of Agriculture](#).

## KEEP YOUR FAMILY SAFE

"Human cases from bird flu are very rare. When they do occur it is from direct touching and handling of infected birds. However, our BFHD team is monitoring to ensure the safest environment for the workers and community," said Dr. Larry Jecha, Interim Health Officer, Benton-Franklin Health District.

- Chicken, eggs and other poultry and poultry products are safe to eat when properly handled and cooked. Be sure to follow these steps for safer food:
  - Wash hands and clean and sanitize work surfaces and equipment.
  - Do not wash poultry or eggs.
  - Separate raw and cooked meat to avoid cross-contamination.
  - Cook poultry thoroughly to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.
  - Keep poultry stored at 40 F or below or, in the freezer at 0 F or below.

**Sick or dead wild birds should not be touched or moved and can be reported using the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's [online reporting tool](#).**

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## REPORT SICK OR DEAD BIRDS

- Report sick/dead domestic birds to the Washington State Department of Agriculture's public phone line: 1-800-606-3056 or online at [Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife](https://www.wa.gov/department-of-fish-and-wildlife).
- Bird hunters should follow standard safety steps to avoid potential exposure to avian influenza and other viruses or bacteria. Learn more tips for hunters click on this link: [Avian influenza \(bird flu\) | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](https://www.wa.gov/department-of-fish-and-wildlife/avian-influenza-bird-flu)
- Read the full press release from WSDA 12-14-2022: [News Releases | Washington State Department of Agriculture](https://www.wa.gov/news-releases)

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