

WIRES H5 High-Pathogenicity Avian Influenza Guidelines October 2026 – Rescue 101

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1. Introduction

Avian influenza is a viral respiratory disease with the potential for severe impacts on poultry and wildlife. Low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI) is found naturally in wild birds globally and within Australia and generally does not cause severe disease, while high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) can cause severe infections and spread rapidly.

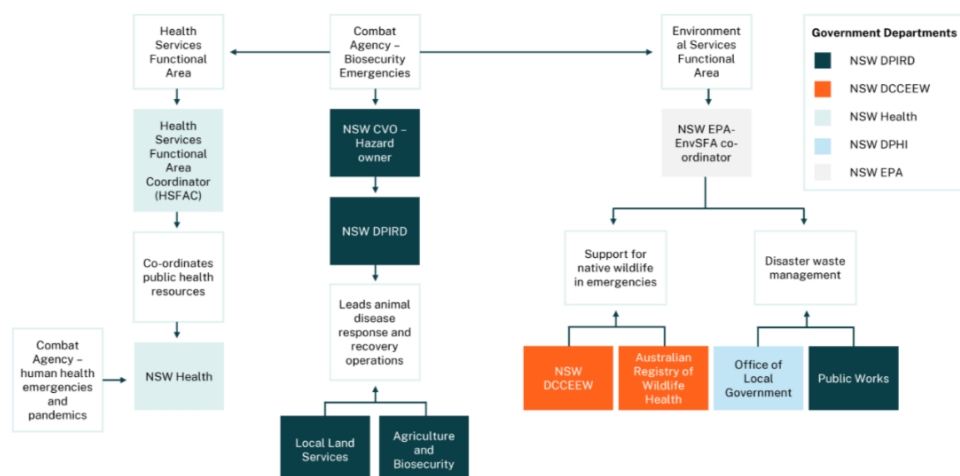
The strain of greatest concern for Australia at this time is the high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b (commonly referred to as H5 bird flu). This strain is highly contagious and able to spread rapidly among wild and domestic bird populations via direct and indirect contact. This strain has been spreading globally since 2021 with unprecedented impact on agriculture and wildlife, including widespread mass mortality events of wildlife overseas.

In November 2025, testing confirmed the presence of this aggressive strain in samples collected from Heard Island, a remote Australian territory. In June 2026, the first cases of this strain were detected in mainland Australia. The first birds confirmed with H5 Bird Flu in Australia in 2026 were pelagic sea birds of species that normally frequent the Great Southern Ocean and its islands. In most years they rarely visit the Australian mainland and were washed ashore after a weather event, already infected with H5 Bird Flu.

Unfortunately, wildlife that become infected and develop symptoms of H5 bird flu generally deteriorate quickly and die within a few days of becoming sick. There is no effective treatment for H5 bird flu in wildlife and the prognosis for birds affected with the virus is poor. Rehabilitation of wild bird with H5 is not recommended.

In NSW, the NSW State Government is responsible for implementing a coordinated response to detections and outbreaks of H5 bird flu in alignment with the overarching policies and guidelines provided by the Federal Government. The relevant combat agencies in NSW are outlined below:

NSW agencies involved in preparedness and response to H5N1 avian influenza in wildlife (as per EMPLAN)



The NSW or federal government may impose restrictions on movement or activities across the wildlife rehabilitation sector to manage the spread of the virus.

IMPORTANT: The information in this document will be reviewed regularly and is subject to change.

2. Overarching Response to an Incursion

The four key phases of emergency management include: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. This approach will apply to managing an outbreak of avian influenza in NSW.

Federal and State governments have been planning and preparing for the inevitable arrival of this virus and are responsible for decision around detections and outbreaks. Any on-ground activities will be implemented by NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), the lead agency for biosecurity emergencies in NSW, with the aim of mitigating the impacts of H5 bird flu on agriculture and the environment and containing the spread of the virus. WIRES will be required to support these operations by following any restrictions or directives issued.

The wildlife rehabilitation sector in NSW is not expected to play an active operational role in response to detections or outbreaks but will be vital for surveillance, community information sharing, biosecurity and risk mitigation. There are four important roles the wildlife rehabilitation sector in NSW is expected to play with H5:

- Support early reporting and ongoing surveillance
- Prevent the spread by ensuring sound biosecurity
- Keep yourself, your family and community safe; and
- Stay informed and help raise and maintain public awareness.

As outlined in the [Wildlife Health Australia Risk Mitigation document](#), wildlife carers should be prepared for the possibility that government authorities may impose prohibitions, reductions, or restrictions on activities. Activities that may be subject to restriction may include, but are not limited to:

- access to wildlife populations and their environment
- access of non-essential staff to wildlife care provider facilities
- wildlife rescue and rehabilitation of some or all species
- wildlife rescue and rehabilitation of animals that are suspected or confirmed to have HPAI.

Government authorities are responsible for determining the minimum biosecurity requirements and any restrictions on activities during an H5 response. It is important that these directions are followed. Circumventing biosecurity requirements may have serious legal and operational consequences. Similarly, intentionally bringing a bird suspected or known to have H5 into care could place other birds at risk of infection and may result in significant animal welfare consequences, including the need for euthanasia if the premises is subsequently determined to be infected.

3. Recognising the Clinical Signs of H5 Bird Flu

Wildlife carers and rescuers must remain vigilant for the signs of the virus. Particular consideration should be given to high-risk species groups, including birds of prey, waterfowl, seabirds and shorebirds, though it should be assumed that any avian species could become infected.

Clinical signs in infected wild birds are largely neurological, respiratory or gastrointestinal and may include:

- Incoordination, tremors, swimming in circles, seizures
- Twisted necks (torticollis) or other abnormal posture
- Inability to stand or fly
- Diarrhoea or regurgitation
- Conjunctivitis, nasal and oral discharge
- Rapid or laboured breathing, coughing or sneezing
- Swelling around the head, neck and eyes
- Cloudiness or change in colour of the eyes
- Sudden death

Infected animals may also be asymptomatic.

Not all cases will display all signs of H5 and how or which symptoms present in Australia's unique species is not widely known at this point. Neurological signs will likely be terminal and if these symptoms present early in the infection, other symptoms may not be noticed. There is no orderly progression of symptoms. An animal may be asymptomatic, show vague signs, show one specific sign or a range of signs, show marked signs or deteriorate rapidly. The timeline for disease progression is highly variable, and could be hours to days, though mostly sits within a 1–2-day period. The recognised incubation period for the virus in birds is up to 14 days.

Wildlife rehabilitators should be alert for the signs of H5 bird flu, but also use common sense when assessing individual animals and the rescue context. For example, the inability to stand or fly, or neurological symptoms may be due to a bird being young or from physical trauma, such as a vehicle collision or window strike.

Unfortunately, wildlife that become infected generally deteriorate quickly and die within a few days of becoming sick. Birds have the potential to show minimal to no clinical signs and still be positive for H5 bird flu. Animals may also die suddenly without displaying any obvious symptoms prior.

There is currently no effective treatment for H5 bird flu despite trialled interventions. Given the prognosis for infected birds is poor, euthanasia is recommended based on animal welfare grounds, and to reduce viral shedding and spread. Treatment through supportive care for threatened species may be considered on a case-by-case basis under government advisement, if the biosecurity risks can be adequately managed.

Culling of healthy, free-ranging wild birds is not considered to be practical or environmentally sound and will therefore not occur as part of Australia's disease management strategy for H5 bird flu. Broad-scale vaccination of free-ranging wild birds is not considered appropriate, feasible or practicable and therefore also does not form part of Australia's H5 response strategy.

Activities including wildlife dispersal or containment, environmental modification and environmental decontamination are also not currently supported by Australia's H5 response framework.

The Federal Government is rolling out a targeted vaccination program for targeted species which is being facilitated by state jurisdictions.

Infected mammals may show a wide range of clinical signs, including:

- Being asymptomatic, especially in the first 1-4 days of infection
- Incoordination and tremors
- Seizures
- Difficulty breathing
- Oral or nasal discharge
- Drooling
- Death and the potential for mass mortality events.

Clinical signs in mammals are more likely to be neurological. Incubation periods for mammals are also believed to be shorter than birds due to a mutation in the virus which makes transmission (for seals, in particular) far easier.

Although mortality may be lower for affected mammals (in poultry almost 100% of infected birds have died, compared with only 2% of infected cows), infectivity remains high with the potential for sudden death and mass mortality events in some species.

Disease progression in mammals varies by species. Carnivores such as cats or foxes, often show a rapid, severe neurological decline, whereas ruminants such as cows experience a more localized drop in function (e.g., severe milk drop) coupled with systemic fever.

Remember H5 Bird Flu can be completely asymptomatic in mammals. Some mammals never show any signs despite being infected.

WIRES is not licenced for the rescue or care of marine mammals therefore reports for marine mammals needing assistance should be referred to the Organisation for the Rescue and Research of Cetaceans in Australia (ORRCA) in the first instance.

4. Modes of Transmission

H5 bird flu can be transferred between wild animals, domestic animals and, rarely, people. It is most commonly transmitted from infected animals via:

- Direct contact with respiratory aerosols, saliva, secretions, faecal matter, urine and milk
- Indirect exposure to contaminated articles and environments including from clothing, equipment, water, surfaces and feed
- Ingestion through predation or scavenging behaviours

Although we should assume that H5 bird flu could infect any wild bird, certain species are considered to be more at risk due to their specific behaviours. This includes birds that are migratory, gregarious or frequently come into contact with other wild species and domestic flocks, such as seabirds, shorebirds and waterfowl, where there may be increased opportunities for disease

transmission through direct contact or contaminated environments. Birds of prey and scavengers are also considered to be at a higher risk as they may contract the virus through ingestion of infected birds or other wildlife. The virus can persist even after an animal has died or for prolonged periods within the environment under certain conditions.

Similarly in wild mammals, including marine species, infections are most likely to occur through predatory or scavenging behaviours, or close contact with seabirds. Therefore, marsupials that are predators or scavengers (e.g. quolls) are expected to be more at risk than plant-eating marsupials like kangaroos. Non-native species such as rats and foxes as well as flying insects may also act as vectors for the disease.

Direct or indirect contact between wildlife in care and free-ranging wildlife or domestic animals can pose a significant biosecurity risk. The risk of disease transmission from wildlife to domestic animals is best managed by strict segregation, including separation of work practices and equipment. Feed, water and shelter should also be provided to wildlife in care in a way that does not attract feral and free-ranging wildlife to the area.

Transmission to humans is rare and usually occurs following prolonged periods of exposure to an infected animal without appropriate baseline biosecurity measures in place.

Transmission Pathways

Every element in the following list functions either as a transmission pathway (vector) or a holding environment (fomite reservoir). HPAI H5 is structurally protected by a fatty lipid envelope, meaning its survival across these mediums is highly dependent on ambient temperature, humidity, and UV exposure. At cool temperatures (e.g 4 °C), the virus can remain infectious for weeks to months, while warm temperatures (e.g 20 °C+) rapidly reduce its lifespan.

The individual roles of these elements in the epidemiology of H5 bird flu include:

Air (Short-Distance Vector)

- Localised spread: The virus travels through the air primarily inside confined environments (like poultry barns) via aerosolised respiratory droplets and dust.
- Limited outdoor reach: True airborne transmission is low. Outside of buildings, infectious particles are rapidly diluted by wind and inactivated by UV sunlight, though virus-laden dust can travel up to 10 metres from infected areas.

Water

- Primary wildlife reservoir pathway: Aquatic birds naturally shed H5 into water via faeces and oral secretions. Water is the most stable matrix for the virus, allowing it to survive for up to 21 days at moderate temperatures (and months in freezing water).
- Flock exposure: Contaminated dams, creeks, or shared surface water sources act as primary conduits that transfer the virus.

Soil & Litter

- Prolonged ground persistence: When mixed with organic farm litter (such as wood shavings or sawdust), the virus can survive for roughly 3 days. In cooler, shade-protected agricultural soil, it can persist for up to 18 days.
- Soil type variations: Highly acidic or sandy topsoil degrades the virus relatively quickly, whereas organic-rich soil compost preserves it, creating an environmental footprint that can track onto footwear or heavy machinery.

Feathers & Dander

- Epidermal replication: The H5 virus replicates inside the skin cells of a bird's feathers.
- Long-term structural protection: Unlike liquid waste which evaporates, fallen feathers shield the virus from the elements. H5 can survive on feathers for 15 days at room temperature and over 120 days in cool environments. Wind can blow infected feathers up to 80 metres away from a facility, broadening the local contamination zone.

Hard Non-Porous Surfaces

- Fomite transmission: Non-porous surfaces like plastic crates, metal enclosures, rubber boots, and glass retain viable viral particles for 3 to 8 hours in warm conditions, and up to 3 days in cool, humid environments.
- Human-mediated spread: These surfaces act as high-risk vectors when equipment, feeding utensils, or vehicles move between properties without undergoing targeted chemical disinfection.

Faecal Matter

- Massive viral loads: High concentrations of H5 are excreted in bird droppings. As wild birds defecate dozens of times per day, they blanket environments rapidly.
- Extended viability: In pure faeces, the virus survives for up to 7 days at room temperature.

Carcasses

- High viral preservation: Dead birds contain large systemic viral loads. The tissues protect the virus from rapid drying and UV exposure, keeping it stable for weeks.
- Mammalian bridge activator: Carcasses are the primary vehicle for mammal spillover. Terrestrial carnivores (foxes, feral cats) and marine scavengers contract the virus (and create opportunities for new mammalian mutations) by feeding directly on infected remains.

Clothing & Footwear

- Mechanical vectoring: Fabric fibres trap virus-laden dander, fluids, and dust. H5 survives on clothing for approximately 1 day.

Paper & Cardboard

- Short to mid-term risk: Corrugated cardboard boxes, egg flats, and paper documents have a porous structure that absorbs moisture, surviving for about 6 days under optimal conditions.

5. Reporting Requirements for H5 Bird Flu

HPAI is a nationally notifiable animal disease, meaning that anyone who suspects an animal might be infected with H5 bird flu has a legal responsibility to report it as soon as possible.

If an animal is suspected to be infected with H5 bird flu, avoid contact with the animal and immediately follow the reporting process below before proceeding with any intervention. Do not handle or remove animals suspected to have H5 bird flu unless instructed to do so by the relevant authority.

Suspected cases of HPAI in wildlife must be reported to the [Emergency Animal Disease \(EAD\) Hotline](#) on 1800 675 888 or via [this online form](#) – operates 24 hours per day from anywhere in Australia.

The following situations must be reported:

- Sick or dead birds of any species, including seabirds, wild birds, backyard poultry or pet birds, anywhere in NSW
- Sick or dead marine mammal species.

The majority of reports for sick birds from the community will be received via the WIRES Rescue Office (WRO). The WRO will triage cases based on processes developed in consultation with the EAD and will refer the MOP to the EAD as required. Alerts for dead birds will not be sent out via xMatters and these cases will be referred to the EAD.

IMPORTANT: Volunteers should exercise caution when attending any bird rescue through xMatters and remain vigilant for signs of H5 that may not have been identified or reported by the member of the public. Any signs of H5 noted by the MOP at the time of the report will be noted in the xMatters alert. If signs consistent with H5 only become apparent once the volunteer has arrived on site and visually assessed the bird, the volunteer should not proceed with handling the animal and should contact the EAD for advice and direction. If the EAD determines the case is low risk for H5, the rescue may proceed in accordance with normal WIRES procedures using baseline PPE.

If WIRES volunteers need to report suspected cases of H5 bird flu (either in care or in the wild), aim to document as much information as possible and provide this to the EAD. Details for each step taken with the animal will be vital if an infection was to occur and the case needs to be traced. Therefore, clear and accurate record keeping from the initial point of contact through each movement of the animal is essential, including contact details and location information for anyone involved, and any changes to the animal's health status. Details on the wildlife population or location of the rescue site will also need to be noted. Where possible, collect the EAD reference number and record it in the WIRES animal record along with details of the advice provided by the EAD.

Key details include:

- Species, age and sex (if known)
- Date and time of report
- Number of animals affected (healthy, sick, deceased)
- Clinical signs of the animal including photos and preferably videos if possible

- Location where the animals were found in the wild (address and GPS coordinates if possible)
- Name and contact details of the individual who observed and collected the animals from the wild
- Current location where the animals are (address and GPS coordinates if possible)

Any reports made to the EAD for animals showing signs of H5 bird flu will be given to the Duty Officer that oversees the specific biosecurity team for the animal. A decision will be made on whether the case will be acted on.

- If the EAD decide there is a risk of H5, the biosecurity team will be activated and coordinate with relevant organisations. This may include collection of the body / animal for testing.
- If the EAD decide there is no or low risk of H5, they will direct the MOP to contact their relevant wildlife organisation for a rescue (e.g. WIRES) or a local vet.

It is at the discretion of the EAD how each case is managed and the timeframe for which it is actioned. The EAD will determine when a case may warrant testing and when a biosecurity team is to be activated to conduct the testing, collection or tracing of an animal, if required.

It is not WIRES role at this time to arrange for, or conduct testing of animals suspected of H5 bird flu. If the animal requires testing, this is to be conducted by relevant personnel arranged by the NSW government who are required to follow specific procedures for sampling.

It is WIRES responsibility to be vigilant in our assessment of birds, to report cases where H5 is suspected and to mitigate any potential spread of the disease.

Once a case has been reported to the EAD, WIRES members are required to follow their direction. Once reported to the EAD, the animal will likely need to be left in situ and should not be moved unless otherwise directed. The EAD may arrange for a biosecurity agent or local Council to attend.

6. Human Health

Avian influenza is a zoonotic disease and can be transmitted to humans and other mammals. Human infections are rare and most people exposed to the virus experience mild or no symptoms, but on occasion, it can cause serious disease or death. NSW Health have advised that the risk to human health is low.

Transmission to humans usually occurs via direct contact with infected birds through respiratory secretions or faecal matter, or indirectly from a contaminated environment through dust, equipment or water. Transmission between people is extremely rare.

Symptoms of H5 bird flu in people are similar to those of seasonal influenza and usually appear 2 to 10 days after exposure. Wildlife carers are at a higher risk of contracting the virus compared to the general public due to their frequent close contact with wild birds and other wildlife.

Common symptoms include:

- fever
- cough
- tiredness
- muscle aches and pains
- sore throat
- runny nose
- shortness of breath
- headache
- conjunctivitis
- gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea are less common

Wildlife carers/rescuers who have had contact with sick or deceased birds and subsequently develop flu-like symptoms must promptly seek medical advice by informing their local Public Health Unit or general practitioner and specifically mention their involvement with wildlife. Early notification will facilitate appropriate assessment, monitoring and testing where required.

Volunteers showing symptoms consistent with influenza should avoid further contact with birds.

See [NSW Health](#) for further information.

Mental Health

During an outbreak of avian influenza, wildlife carers and rescuers may witness circumstances that could be confronting such as mass mortality events, restrictions on rescue activities, animals that are suffering, managing members of the public, or the large-scale euthanasia of animals. Due to the severity of disease in most bird species and the high infectivity, sadly, the outcome is likely to be death or euthanasia.

The emotional strain of these situations has the potential to build up and cause stress, burnout, anxiety or grief. Traumatic events can also lead to mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression or manifest in unhealthy coping mechanisms. It is important to

take a step back and regularly assess how you are feeling and learn to recognise the symptoms of these mental health concerns both in yourself, and in those around you.

Stress is a normal reaction of the body to an abnormal event. Physical symptoms may include: fatigue, headache, chills, chest pain, dizziness, elevated heart rate, twitching, profuse sweating and difficulty breathing. Psychological signs may include confusion, fear, grief, panic, poor concentration, agitation, depression, overwhelm, loss of emotional control, feelings of helplessness and sleep disturbance. Stress can also lead to bad decision making and makes us more likely to take risks. Stress is helpful during short-term challenges, however when experienced long term, it can build up and cause burnout – a state of chronic stress that is accompanied by feelings of extreme exhaustion and overwhelm.

Burnout can happen to anyone, so it is important to know the signs and what to do. These symptoms can also be easily confused with depression and psychologists may be likely to diagnose sufferers with something else such as depression or anxiety.

The signs of burnout

- Losing the motivation that led you to take on the role in the first place
- Feeling helpless and cynical
- Becoming easily annoyed
- Doubting that you are making a difference
- Feeling that your efforts are not appreciated or under valued
- Feeling overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands
- Sense of failure and self doubt
- Feeling trapped or ineffective

If you are feeling any of the above, it is likely time to step back and re-evaluate your commitments. Like many of the good things in life, too much volunteering can sometimes be a bad thing. Moderation is the key.

Emergency workers, including wildlife rescuers, can face a disproportionate amount of trauma, and WIRES recommends volunteers and staff working in the wildlife sector utilise the Black Dog Institute National Emergency Worker Support Service for mental health support. This free program has been developed by leading mental health specialists and provides invaluable mental health and wellbeing support for the wildlife sector, recognising the important work of wildlife rescuers and carers as emergency service providers.

Resources for further support and information:

WIRES Volunteer Support Manager: vsm@wires.org.au

Black Dog Institute: assess your state of mind, recognise your symptoms, and employ strategies to improve your overall wellbeing, gather advice on finding a mental health professional. Visit the [National Emergency Worker Support Service](#).

Lifeline: 24-hour Australian crisis counselling service. Phone: 13 11 14 or visit <http://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Beyond Blue: 24-hour phone support and online chat service and links to resources and apps. Phone: 1300 22 4636 or visit <http://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

7. Personal Considerations

Given the potential implications of H5 bird flu on human health, the high infectivity of the disease, and the quarantine requirements for birds in care during an outbreak, WIRES volunteers must give careful consideration as to whether they can continue to actively rescue birds. This is a decision that each individual should make with their personal circumstances, the risks involved and the capabilities of their facilities in mind.

Below are some of the key questions that should be considered as part of this decision making:

- Are you immunosuppressed or in frequent contact with someone who is?
- Are you pregnant?
- Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent?
- Do you have pet birds, including caged birds or domestic poultry?
- Do you have other domestic pets, including cats and dogs?
- Do you have a current vaccination for seasonal human influenza or are willing to get one?

Personal Health Profile

Avian influenza in humans is an acute respiratory infection and, while rare, it can cause severe disease. Death as a result of the virus is very rare. A number of factors influence zoonotic risk, but those who are immunosuppressed, pregnant, elderly, young children or have an existing condition may be particularly susceptible due to differences in their immune systems.

You should discuss the risks with your doctor to ensure you are making an informed decision based on your circumstances.

If your personal health profile puts you at a higher risk for contracting H5 bird flu, you may choose to adjust your level of involvement in rescue and care activities.

Risk Levels for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may be at higher risk of being infected with, and experiencing poorer health outcomes from, avian influenza. Sharing an interconnected relationship with Country, including a connection to animals, may mean Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are exposed more often to avian influenza. Working as rangers, land managers and researchers, particularly in regional locations, may also make exposure to avian influenza viruses more likely.

When exposures to, or cases of, avian influenza occur among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, the local public health unit (PHU) should be notified. PHUs will collaborate with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and may collaborate with Aboriginal community leaders.

Vaccination Status

[NSW Health](#) recommends the seasonal influenza vaccine for all personnel in regular contact with animals that may carry avian influenza. While there is no specific vaccine for avian influenza, the human influenza vaccine protects against other strains of the influenza virus and may reduce symptoms. It also lowers the risk of coinfection with avian influenza and human influenza viruses which helps to prevent recombination and the potential for mutation into new strains of the virus.

Pets At Home

Infectious diseases can be transferred between wildlife, people and domestic animals. Given the high infectivity of H5 bird flu, those with pets at home, including caged birds, poultry, dogs, cats or other livestock carry additional risks.

Domestic avian animals are particularly susceptible and could contract an infection from direct or indirect contact with affected wildlife, people or other domestic animals. Sadly, due to the severity of disease in most bird species, the outcome is likely to be death or euthanasia.

Due to the significant risk of an infection and the poor prognosis of infected animals, those with pet birds are encouraged to consider their level of participation.

Mammalian pets are also susceptible to H5 bird flu and may become exposed through direct contact with infected wild birds or other domestic animals, as well as through contact with deceased birds or contaminated environments such as water or food sources, clothing or surfaces. Injured, infant, aged or already sick pets may also be more susceptible to infection. Cats are severely affected by H5 Bird Flu.

8. Biosecurity Measures for Rescue

The following section applies generally to NSW however as some WIRES branches operate alongside state boundaries, in the event of an incursion in Victoria, Queensland or South Australia, border branches may require additional measures to mitigate risk. Additional measures for certain branches will be considered and implemented as and when required by the NSW government.

Good baseline biosecurity practices should be followed before, during and after working with any wildlife regardless of H5 status in Australia.

While the wildlife rehabilitation sector is not expected to play an active operational role during an incursion of H5 bird flu and activities are likely to be restricted, enhanced biosecurity protocols will be critical to prevent further infection and spread of disease for animals already in care.

Baseline Biosecurity

Good baseline biosecurity measures should be practiced diligently for all rescue activities. This includes:

- Practicing good hygiene (e.g. rigorous hand washing with soap and warm water)
- Wearing appropriate PPE and properly removing it to avoid cross-contamination (see resources below)
- Correct donning and doffing of PPE
- Dedicated site footwear
- Cleaning followed by disinfection of boots/shoes after use.
- Avoiding touching the eyes, mouth and nose, including eating, drinking and smoking, while working with animals
- Prioritising seasonal vaccination for human influenza
- Keeping the work environment clean and tidy
- Cleaning spills of blood and other bodily substances
- Cleaning and disinfecting (or safely disposing of) equipment after use
- Appropriate management and disposal of waste material (including PPE, animal, food, water and clinical waste)
- Avoiding movement between infected and uninfected sites without decontamination
- Appropriate management of laundry (bedding, towels and worker clothing)
- Safe use and disposal of sharps such as needles and scalpel blades, as well as cleaning of knives for food preparation
- Managing accidental exposures to blood and body substances, as well as animal bites, scratches and sharps injuries

Minimum Baseline PPE includes:

- Disposable gloves (nitrile preferred, vinyl and latex also adequate)
- N95 / P2 Face mask
- Eye protection

Donning Baseline PPE

The correct sequence of donning PPE ensures that each item is secured without contaminating another. You must wash your hands or use alcohol-based sanitizer before touching any PPE. The protective progression starts with foundational layers and ends with sealing components that must not be adjusted later.

1. Respiratory protection: Put your mask or respirator on before your safety glasses. This makes sure nothing gets in the way of a tight seal against your skin. For respirators (like N95s), perform a seal check by exhaling sharply to ensure no air escapes the edges.
2. Eye and face protection: Place glasses or face shield over the face and eyes and adjust to fit. Glasses or face shields protect mucous membranes from airborne or splashed contaminants. See the following link for how to fit and wear a P2 mask: [Wearing a P2_N95 mask infographic.pdf](#)
3. Hand protection: Gloves go on last, allowing you to handle remaining items without contamination. Do not touch your face while wearing gloves.

This structured approach ensures no exposed areas remain and minimizes the risk of compromising sterile or clean components. [Safe Work Australia emphasizes that when multiple items of PPE are worn, they must be compatible](#). If the items are put on in the wrong order, they may not fit together properly. For example, safety glasses can break the airtight seal of a respirator. This interference makes the equipment ineffective.

Doffing Baseline PPE

1. **Gloves:** Gloves are typically the most contaminated item and should be removed first using the "glove-to-glove, skin-to-skin" technique. This method ensures that your bare hands never touch the dirty exterior of the glove, preventing immediate cross-contamination.
2. **Eye and face protection:** Only touch the "clean" parts, like the earpieces or the headband at the back. Reach behind your head and pull the gear straight forward and away from your face. This keeps any dust or splashes on the front from falling into your eyes.
3. **Respiratory protection:** Remove your mask or respirator only after leaving the hazardous zone to ensure you do not inhale any lingering airborne particles. Always grasp the bottom ties or elastics first, followed by the top ones, and pull the mask straight forward away from your face without touching the filter material.

[Refer to this document for more donning and doffing baseline PPE information.](#)

All equipment, tools and clothing used during the rescue, handling and transport of an animal must be cleaned and disinfected.

Disinfectants suitable against H5 bird flu virus on surfaces thoroughly cleaned of organic matter can be found in the following document: [Disinfectants active against avian influenza viruses](#).

PPE is the last line of defence and sits at the bottom of the hierarchy of control measure, and wearing disposable gloves, for example, is not a substitute for appropriate hand hygiene, as per Safe Work Australia and Section 5.3.2 of the National Wildlife Biosecurity Guidelines.

PPE is an effective control measure for reducing contamination if used effectively, however there are also risks that items may fail, be incorrectly fitted, or incorrectly removed which can cause contamination. If contamination occurs, virus may continue to shed, but after 48 hours this may not be enough to infect susceptible species.

Enhanced Biosecurity

Enhanced biosecurity may involve wearing additional PPE, quarantine measures, transport controls and facility-wide protocols (including within private homes) that increase hygiene and limit movement to minimize the risk of contamination and manage the spread of disease. This also encompasses regional, state or national controls imposed by government authorities on movements and activities as part of the overarching disease eradication response.

Wildlife rescuers should consider what protocols they could reasonably put in place if a large-scale outbreak was to occur in NSW and enhanced biosecurity measures are required. Conditions and considerations for quarantine are detailed in **Section 9**.

Broadly, enhanced biosecurity measures for rescuers may include:

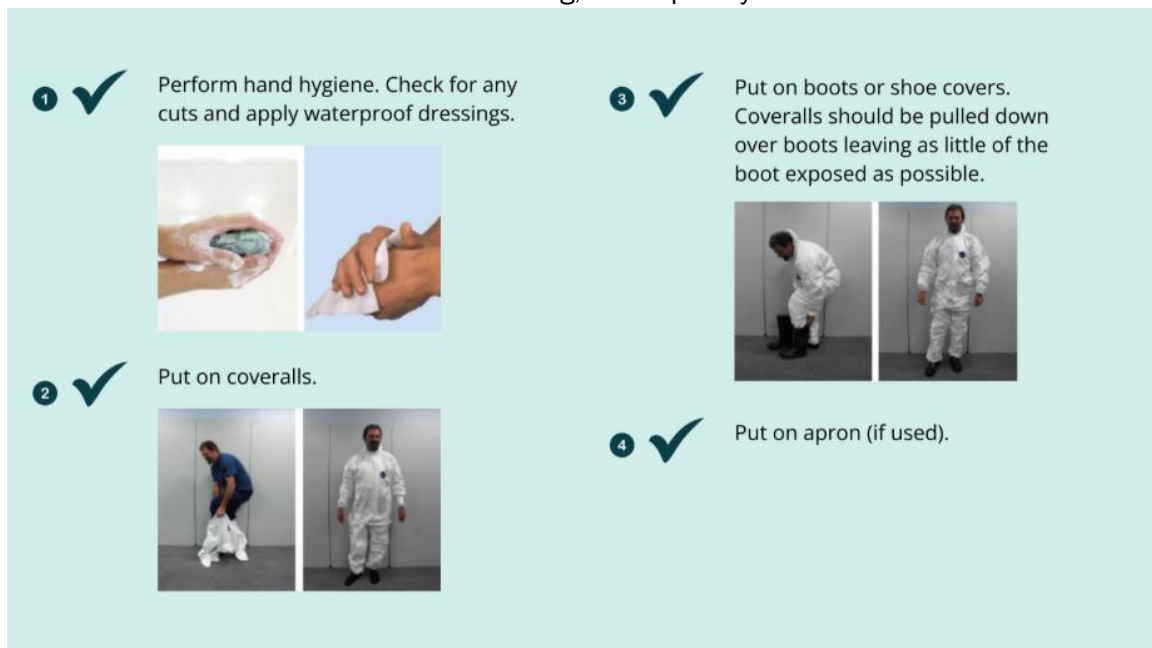
- Greater vigilance in implementing baseline biosecurity measures
- Enhanced PPE (see below)
- Movement restrictions for animals and people with a reduction or cessation in rescue or care activities
- Diligent cleaning and disinfection of footwear, clothing, equipment and facilities between individual animals and groups of animals
- Minimising the number of people participating to only those required

Enhanced PPE includes:

- Disposable coveralls
- Rubber or polyurethane boots (or boot covers)
- Safety goggles
- Disposable gloves (nitrile preferred, vinyl and latex also adequate)
- N95 / P2 facemask and face shield or full-face respirator
- Disposable PPE, instruments and biological waste should be disposed of using the double bag method in sealable waste bags labelled as biohazards.

The following video developed by the Australian Registry of Wildlife Health, provides practical guidance on the correct use of PPE when working with potentially infectious wildlife or contaminated environments, including the step-by-step process for safely putting on and removing PPE to reduce the risk of disease exposure and prevent cross-contamination. **Enhanced PPE Donning and Doffing:** [Watch Video Here](#)

The step-by-step guide for donning enhanced PPE is sourced from the NSW Government's HPAI Field Officer Training, developed by DPIRD.



5 ✓ Put on respirator, which should be at minimum, an N95/P2 face mask. Do a fit check to ensure a proper seal has been established see Figure 1. 	7 ✓ Put on single-use disposable gloves. 
6 ✓ Put on eye protection (goggles/face shield). 	8 ✓ Put on reusable, heavy-duty gloves.

✓ Clean and disinfect boots. ✓ Remove outer gloves. ✓ Decontaminate inner gloves (using disinfectant wipe or equivalent). # ✓ Decontaminate and disinfect surfaces, samples, and equipment. ✓ Seal the disinfected samples into a small plastic bag, spray disinfectant on the outside of that plastic bag. ✓ Remove apron (if used). ✓ Remove boots.** ✓ Remove coveralls.**	✓ Decontaminate inner gloves (using disinfectant wipe or equivalent). # ✓ Remove eye protections (face shield, goggles). ✓ Decontaminate inner gloves (using disinfectant wipe or equivalent). # ✓ Remove respirator. ✓ Remove inner gloves. ✓ Perform hand hygiene. ^ ✓ Shower, wash hair, and change into clean clothing when possible.
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9. Rescue Operations

Wildlife rescuers may be among the first to encounter affected wildlife and should remain alert for clinical signs of H5 bird flu especially when attending rescues for birds.

It is WIRES' responsibility to carefully assess birds and other wildlife, report suspected H5 cases, help mitigate potential disease spread, and comply with all government directives regarding the

reporting, rescue, or care of affected animals, as well as comply with any restrictions on activities that may be imposed by the government.

Reports for sick birds received by WIRES will be assessed and triaged by the WIRES Rescue Office. Cases will be referred to the Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) Hotline as required, and it's possible the EAD will assess the case and deem it appropriate to be referred back to WIRES, or other rescue organisation to proceed through usual rescue processes. As a result, you will continue to receive xMatters alerts for sick, and injured birds that require rescue and transport to a vet, in accordance with standard procedures.

- For cases where there is one or more bird of the high-risk species that is not exhibiting signs of H5, it will likely be sent out via xMatters with a disclaimer reminding to be vigilant for signs of H5. Although these animals may not be exhibiting obvious signs of H5, they are considered higher-risk and it is recommended that handlers wear baseline PPE (gloves, mask & eye protection) when handling high risk species. There will be some instances where based on the location or the species or some other factor, where even if the bird is not presenting with H5, it may not be sent out on xMatters.
- For cases where there is one or more bird from of any species exhibiting clinical signs of H5, the case will be assessed by the WRO and may be referred to the EAD for review. If the EAD determine they do not need to progress the case further, the MOP may contact WIRES again. It is at WIRES discretion as to whether these cases are sent out via xMatters.
- For cases where there is one or more bird from any species, excluding the high-risk species, not exhibiting signs of H5, it will be sent out via xMatters as normal. Upon attending, the rescuer should assess the animal for signs of H5. If the animal has clinical signs of H5, it should be reported to the EAD (1800 675 888) and the rescuer should not handle or remove the animal until the EAD has reviewed the case.
- WIRES is not sending out cases of deceased birds on xMatters and these are usually referred to the EAD as per the government reporting requirements.

Species groups that are higher-risk for H5 that you may receive alerts for include seabirds, shorebirds and waterfowl.

The EAD will determine when a case may warrant testing and when a biosecurity team is to be activated to conduct any testing or collection of an animal if required.

A suggested script for rescuers when onsite and cannot proceed with the rescue and a MOP is present:

The signs I've observed with this animal may be consistent with a range of conditions, including the possibility of H5 avian influenza and we need to take appropriate precautions as it is a zoonotic disease and a notifiable disease. If you have already handled the bird, please wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap and avoid further contact. Please do not transport or move the bird and keep pets and children away from the bird. H5 avian influenza is a notifiable disease in Australia meaning we are required to report the animal to the Emergency Animal Disease hotline and cannot intervene with handling the

animal until they have assessed the case. I will report this animal now to the EAD. Please note that EAD is a separate agency managed by the NSW government and is not connected with WIRES. We are unable to advise how the EAD will assess or manage the case, including collection decisions or response timeframes, as these are determined by NSW DPIRD based on their risk assessments. I'm sorry that we're unable to assist with immediately rescuing the animal in this instance and I understand that this can be difficult. Given the potential disease risk in addition to the government reporting requirements, we are unable to intervene further until we receive advice from the EAD. We will ensure the report is passed on to the EAD so they can assess the situation and determine the appropriate response.

Wildlife Rescues

Before, during and after a rescue, volunteers must monitor animals for signs of disease, practice good hygiene and follow baseline biosecurity protocols (**Section 8**).

Before Attending a Rescue

Prior to conducting a rescue:

- Prepare the appropriate baseline PPE if required, as described in **Section 8**.
- Collect as much information as possible about the rescue situation.
- Assess for any clinical signs of H5.
- Disinfect boots, clothing, field equipment and gear prior to arrival.

During Wildlife Handling

Avoid directly handling any sick or dead animals. Any person handling sick or dead wild animals must follow strict work health and safety measures. This includes:

- Thoroughly washing hands both before and after handling wildlife, and any potentially contaminated materials or secretions. Hands and arms should be washed with abundant soap and warm water, then dried thoroughly, even if gloves are used. Hand sanitizer (gel with 60 to 90% ethanol concentration) can be applied to reinforce disinfection but should not replace proper handwashing.
- Wearing appropriate PPE if required, as described in **Section 8**.
- Use a barrier such as a towel or pillow-case between hands and the animal.
- Avoiding rubbing eyes or touching the mouth, eating, drinking, or smoking.

Before undertaking any activities or interventions, observe the animal for any unusual signs of sickness or death from a distance. If there is any suspicion that the animal may be infected with H5 bird flu, this must be reported immediately to the EAD, as described in **Section 5**. Do not attempt to handle, transport or remove the animal unless explicitly instructed to do so by the relevant authorities such as DPIRD or the EAD.

Aim to collect as much information as possible on the situation (e.g. location, species and number of affected animals) and any clinical signs (e.g. description and photo / video evidence) for

reporting, without compromising the baseline biosecurity measures or making contact with any animals present, as outlined in **Section 5**.

If there is no indication of H5 bird flu, proceed with the rescue as normal.

Mass Mortality Events

If you find yourself at a site where multiple animals are sick or dead, this must immediately be referred to the EAD.

If the EAD decide there is a risk of H5, the biosecurity team will be activated and will coordinate with the relevant authorities to conduct testing, collection of animals or further tracing. It is not WIRES role at this time to arrange for, or conduct testing or collection of animals suspected of H5 bird flu. If the EAD decide there is no or a low risk of H5, the case may be referred back to WIRES to action as normal.

If there are members of the public onsite, it is critical that they not handle any affected wildlife as they may be exposed to diseases that can spread to humans. Pets should also be kept away from sick or dead wildlife.

Signage for public use is available through the [DPI Resources for H5 Preparedness](#) webpage.

For members of the public seeking additional information, they can be directed to the following website: [Bird flu \(Avian influenza\) - DAFF](#)

After Wildlife Handling

Refer to the [WIRES H5 Risk Assessment](#) for details regarding transport and cleaning considerations.

Transporting animals

WIRES volunteers at this time are not expected to rescue and transport suspect H5 animals. If you are concerned however, take the following precautions as provided by DPIRD:

- Wear a mask during transport
- Have the air-conditioning on and vents directed towards your face
- Have a towel over the carrier to reduce spread of particles
- Have the animal on the backseat or at as great a distance to you as possible (animals must not go in the boot of a vehicle)
- Have the windows down to assist with ventilation throughout the vehicle
- Don't attend or transport the animal if you aren't comfortable

Following rescue, be sure to:

- Remove PPE properly to avoid self-contamination. See **Section 8**.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect boots, clothing, field equipment and rescue gear before departure from site, and always before visiting any other site.

- Dispose of waste appropriately, including disposable equipment and PPE (see below).
- Wash hands and arms thoroughly.
- Consider ‘fogging’ the internal space in the vehicle with F10. Fogging with F10SC Veterinary Disinfectant, (a spray of fine mist-like droplets) has been shown to be effective in eliminating airborne micro-organisms. In spraying and aerosol/fogging applications it is advisable to wear a disposable mask over mouth and nose, and eye protection.

Anyone who has handled wildlife should avoid contact with domestic birds and poultry for at least 48 hours and avoid visiting multiple high-risk sites in one day such as wetlands, swamps, bird colonies or farms. This is a precautionary measure recommended in Section 3.3.3 of the WHA Toolkit.

Disposing of PPE

Disposable PPE, including gloves and masks, should be placed directly into a sturdy rubbish bag, sealed and disposed of appropriately. Where PPE has been used during a suspected H5 incident, consider double-bagging the waste and follow any additional directions provided by the Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) Hotline or relevant authorities. Reusable PPE and equipment (such as eye protection) should be thoroughly cleaned with detergent to remove organic material and then disinfected using an appropriate disinfectant (see Section 8). Allow items to dry completely before storage.

Access to Veterinary Support

The decision to accept or deny birds/wildlife into a clinic is an individual business decision. Veterinarians have a legal responsibility to alleviate suffering but if they are unable to, they are required to recommend another service.

The AVA (Australian Veterinary Association) supports practices to continue caring for sick and injured wildlife but state that precautions must be taken when being asked to assess sick or dead birds. The AVA recommend clients phone ahead so practices can safely triage the case, prepare appropriate biosecurity measures, and determine whether they can manage the patient or arrange referral if required. This advance notice gives staff time to prepare, establish an isolation area, ready PPE, and brief the team before the patient arrives, which is far safer than managing a suspected case that presents unannounced at the front desk.

At this time, expect some delays when dropping birds off at veterinary clinics. Where possible, birds should be contained in a cardboard box that can be handed over to veterinary staff. This will avoid the need to wait onsite for the carrier to be returned and will help minimise delays for rescuers.

The current AVA messaging can be found here: [High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza - Australian Veterinary Association](#).

The AVA Avian Influenza Guidelines for Veterinarians can be found here: [National H5 HPAI guidelines for veterinarians](#)

IMPORTANT: Please phone vet clinics in advance, as many are still accepting birds/wildlife but may be using a different entrance or may have changed admission procedures.

WIRES Head Office must be notified in order to update the relevant systems to ensure MOPs are being directed to vets that are willing to accept wildlife. If volunteers are made aware that a clinic has adjusted their admission protocols for wildlife, please email members@wires.org.au.

Disposal and Decontamination

Bird carcasses, contaminated articles, biological waste and general waste present a significant risk for disease transmission. These items should be treated as potentially infectious and require prompt containment and disposal.

Disposal guidelines are determined by DPIRD and are subject to change during an incursion of H5 bird flu. Currently, the NSW Government provides published advice on the safe disposal of bird carcasses from public and private land:

[Disposal of bird carcasses from public and private land: General public](#)

[NSW Public Land Managers Guidance for disposal of dead wildlife following the detection of high pathogenicity avian influenza H5N1 \(H5 bird flu\) in NSW](#)

Disposable PPE, instruments and biological waste should be disposed of using the double bag method in sealable waste bags labelled as biohazards.

All tools or equipment used in the collection, handling, transport and disposal of animals, must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after use, as outlined in **Section 8**.

Refer to: [Disinfectants active against avian influenza viruses](#).

10. Resources

[AUSVETPLAN – Response Strategy – Avian Influenza](#)

[Wildlife Health Australia – HPAI Risk Mitigation Toolbox](#)

[Avian influenza in wildlife in Australia Factsheet](#)

[National Wildlife Biosecurity Guidelines](#)

[AUSVETPLAN Operation Manual - Decontamination](#)

[Australian Centre for Disease Control – National Guidelines for Avian Influenza](#)