

H5 Bird Flu and Pets

What Australian pet owners need to know

H5 bird flu is a serious, highly contagious disease that mainly affects birds.

Cats and dogs can sometimes become sick if they eat or interact with infected birds or other animals.

While infections in cats and dogs are rare, pet owners can take simple steps to reduce the risk. The risk to people in Australia remains low.

Signs of bird flu in cats and dogs

Signs may include:

- fever
- lethargy
- decreased appetite
- reddened or inflamed eyes
- discharge from eyes and nose
- coughing or sneezing
- difficulty breathing
- neurological signs, like tremors, seizures, incoordination, or blindness
- death.



Photo by Andrew S

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet promptly if your pet develops any of these signs or dies unexpectedly, particularly after contact with sick or dead birds or other wildlife.

Bird flu in cats is rare, but the illness can be severe and is often fatal. Difficulty breathing is a medical emergency and requires urgent veterinary attention.

Bird flu is a notifiable animal disease. If you suspect bird flu, you must also report it to the 24-hour Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on **1800 675 888**.

Protect cats and dogs

- Keep pets away from sick or dead birds and other wildlife.
- Keep dogs on a leash, especially near wildlife, waterways and coastal areas.
- Keep cats contained at home and indoors where possible. This reduces their risk of hunting or coming into contact with infected wildlife.
- Do not leave pet food or water where wild birds or other animals can access it.
- Keep pets away from bird baths and other places where wildlife gathers.
- Regularly clean and disinfect bird baths and water containers.

Protect pet birds and backyard poultry

- Prevent contact between your birds and wild birds.
- Keep enclosures and equipment clean.
- Keep food and water clean and protected from wildlife.
- Practise good hygiene and wash your hands after handling birds or equipment.
- Limit visitor access and quarantine new birds before introducing them.

If you find sick or dead birds

Avoid contact. Record what you see. Report it.

- Do not touch sick or dead birds or allow children or pets near them.
- Report multiple sick or dead birds or other animals to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on **1800 675 888**.
- If you find an injured bird, avoid contact, record the location and contact a wildlife rescue service in your state or territory.
- If you have had direct contact with sick or dead birds, shower and change clothes before touching your pets.

More information:

- birdflu.gov.au
- [H5 avian influenza \(bird flu\) frequently asked questions](#)
- [Report suspected bird flu](#)
- [Bird and pet owners and bird flu](#)
- [Australian Veterinary Association](#)