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Should Contra Costa Providers Be Concerned about Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza?

Contra Costa Public Health is issuing this advisory to provide situational awareness regarding recent activity for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI.) On April 5th, 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a [Health Alert](#) informing providers about the first documented case of a human influenza A H5N1 infection after exposure to dairy cattle. This is the first report of transmission from dairy cattle to a human. The individual presented with mild symptoms, primarily conjunctivitis, was treated with Oseltamivir (Tamiflu), and recovered completely. There was no secondary spread to other human close contacts documented. Further investigation by CDC, USDA, FDA and other federal partners confirmed that the virus does not show markers associated with resistance to known influenza antivirals, such as Oseltamivir. Genetic sequencing of the isolate also identified that the virus lacked adaptations that would make it more likely to infect mammals.

Currently, HPAI A(H5N1) viruses are circulating among wild birds in the United States, with associated outbreaks among poultry and backyard flocks and sporadic infections in mammals. There have been no documented cases of HPAI human infection in Contra Costa County nor in California. CDC states the current risk to the general population is low but certain individuals with occupational or recreational exposures to wild birds, backyard flocks and cattle might be at increased risk.

Although Contra Costa Providers should not be unduly concerned about HPAI currently, they should know how to assess a patient who presents with influenza-like illness symptoms and determine if they were exposed by doing the following:

- **Ask about potential for recent exposure (within 10 days) to HPAI through any of the following:**
 - Exposure to HPAI A(H5N1) virus infected birds or other animals defined as follows:
 - Close exposure (within six feet) to birds or other animals, with confirmed avian influenza A(H5N1) virus infection. Bird or other animal exposures can include, but are not limited to handling, slaughtering, defeathering, butchering, culling, or preparing birds or other animals for consumption, or consuming uncooked or undercooked food or related uncooked food products, including unpasteurized (raw) milk, OR
 - [Direct contact](#) with surfaces contaminated with feces, unpasteurized (raw) milk or other unpasteurized dairy products, or bird or animal parts (e.g., carcasses, internal organs) from infected birds or other animals, OR

- Visiting a live bird market with confirmed bird infections or associated with a case of human infection with HPAI A(H5N1) virus.
- Exposure to an infected person – Close (within six feet) unprotected (without use of respiratory and eye protection) exposure to a person who is a confirmed, probable, or symptomatic suspected case of human infection with HPAI A(H5N1) virus (e.g., in a household or healthcare facility).
- Laboratory exposure (unprotected exposure to HPAI A(H5N1) virus in a laboratory)
- **If a provider suspects infection with Avian Influenza due to the above exposures:**
 - Isolate patient and notify your Infection Control Team; follow infection control recommendations, including using PPE.
 - Collect respiratory specimens from the patient to test for influenza A(H5N1) virus at the public health laboratory. If the exposed person has conjunctivitis, with or without respiratory symptoms, both a conjunctival swab and a nasopharyngeal swab should be collected for testing.
 - Initiate empiric antiviral treatment as soon as possible. Do not delay treatment while awaiting laboratory results.
 - Notify Contra Costa Public Health to arrange testing for influenza A(H5N1) virus.
 - Call 925-313-6740 ASAP to report
 - Encourage patients to isolate at home away from their household members and not go to work or school until it is determined they do not have avian influenza A(H5N1) virus infection.

There are still many unanswered questions about this virus especially as it relates to dairy herds and cattle in general. Providing information regarding safety of the milk supply is outside the scope of this advisory however patients should always be advised to not consume raw or unpasteurized dairy products due to increased risk of not only HPAI but also myriad other pathogens such as *Campylobacter sp.*, *Listeria m.*, *Brucella sp.*, *Salmonella sp.*, and *E. coli*. For more information about the risks of consumption of raw milk exposure, click [here](#).

Additional resources on HPAI are below:

[Interim Guidance on Influenza Antiviral Chemoprophylaxis of Persons Exposed to Birds with Avian Influenza A Viruses Associated with Severe Human Disease or with the Potential to Cause Severe Human Disease | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Updated Interim Recommendations for Worker Protection and Use of Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) to Reduce Exposure to Novel Influenza A Viruses Associated with Disease in Humans | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A\(H5N1\) Virus in Animals: Interim Recommendations for Prevention, Monitoring, and Public Health Investigations | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)