



Information about Dead Birds in Georgia

The Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) has been monitoring West Nile Virus infections in birds and people since 2001. In addition, the GDPH is working with the Georgia Department of Agriculture, the U.S.D.A, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to detect and respond to the possible arrival of avian influenza in Georgia birds.

West Nile Virus (WNV)

WNV in Birds and Mosquitoes:

- WNV is a virus that may cause disease in some species of birds. It can occasionally cause disease in humans and horses, and rarely in other mammals.
- WNV is spread by mosquito bites. A mosquito must bite an infected bird first before it can infect another animal or human.
- The mosquitoes primarily found infected with WNV (*Culex* spp) prefer to feed on birds, but will occasionally bite humans and other mammals.
- Testing dead birds is a way of tracking virus activity, but because they can be highly mobile, they are not a good indicator of the human disease risk at any given location. Rather, testing provides an overview of the presence of WNV across the state. Therefore, it is not necessary to test every dead bird. This tracking can be done effectively by testing only a percentage of dead birds.
- Certain bird species seem to be highly susceptible to the disease, and it is these birds that are picked up for testing. The birds found to be most susceptible throughout the United States are crows, blue jays, and birds of prey (hawks). In Atlanta, it appears that crows and jays continue to be the birds that are most affected by the virus. In other counties this may be different, so other species of birds might be tested.
- Environmental Health offices follow strict guidelines to determine what kinds of birds are picked up for testing and in what condition. This is to assure that testing resources are best utilized, since birds die from many things besides WNV.

WNV and Humans:

- You cannot get WNV from handling dead birds or by contact with a sick horse, human, or other mammal. You can only get WNV by being bitten by an infected mosquito.
- WNV is usually a more a severe problem for the elderly and for those with chronic disease, and most people have mild or no symptoms of disease. However, everyone should take precautions to avoid or limit mosquito bites.
- You and your family should take precautions against mosquito bites

regardless of whether or not a dead bird is tested or whether a bird tests positive or negative for WNV.

- Everyone, except infants and pregnant women, should wear a DEET-based repellent when outside if mosquitoes are biting. Two other products, picaridin (Cutter Advanced™) and oil of lemon eucalyptus (PMD) have also been found to be good mosquito repellents, although these may not provide adequate protection against tick bites. Pregnant women and parents of infants should ask their health care providers for information on product use, although DEET-based repellents can be used on children over the age of 2 months. USE ALL PRODUCTS ACCORDING TO LABEL INSTRUCTIONS.
- Putting Repel Permanone® on your clothing (not your skin) will also help protect you from mosquito and tick bites. This product is available in sporting goods stores. Pregnant women and parents of infants should ask their health care providers for information on product use.

How to Limit Sources of WNV in the Environment:

- Do not use repellents designed for humans on your pets. Ask your vet for products that can be used on animals.
- It is important to empty all containers around your house and in your neighborhood that can hold water at least once a week, as many mosquito problems are created locally by mosquitoes breeding in flower pots, gutters, catch basins (storm drain inlets or curb inlets), untended swimming pools, and any container that can hold water for more than a week. Be sure all rain gutters are cleaned regularly.
- Window screens should be in good repair and in use if windows are open.

Testing Dead Birds:

- Dead birds that may have WNV (birds other than waterfowl/shore birds, poultry, and birds of prey) should be reported to your county environmental health department.
(Environmental Health Contact Numbers:
<http://dph.georgia.gov/sites/dph.georgia.gov/files/EnvHealth/ContactInformation.pdf>)
- Environmental Health will most likely make note of the location of the bird, but will likely not pick the bird up for testing. Most counties are keeping a log of dead bird calls to help with WNV surveillance, and there may be a report line available for after working hours. If no one is available at the county to take the information, the bird may be safely disposed of, but precautions should be taken to reduce exposure to mosquitoes regardless.
- If the bird is not picked up for testing, which is likely, you can safely dispose of it by double bagging and placing it in the trash or by burying it. Birds that die of WNV do not pose a human threat. They are useful only as an indicator of increases or decreases in virus activity.

- Do not handle the bird with bare hands. Although WNV is not transmitted by handling infected birds, it is always best to take this precaution when handling any dead animal.
- Birds must be very fresh for testing to be useful. If the bird is not refrigerated, decomposition occurs rapidly. Consequently, birds that have been dead more than 48 hours (eyes will be shrunken or gone) or birds covered in ants can't be tested for WNV.

Avian Influenza

Avian Influenza Virus in Birds and Other Animals:

- Like humans, birds have naturally occurring influenza (flu) viruses. "Bird flu" is a non-scientific term that is used to describe a specific avian influenza virus (H5N1) that has been spreading in Asia since 1997 and is now in Europe and Africa. This particular virus has been very rarely associated with human illness and death.
- Naturally occurring avian influenza viruses in wild birds are generally found in waterfowl (ducks and geese), gulls, and some species of shore birds and typically do not cause illness in these birds. These viruses occasionally "jump" from these wild birds to domestic birds such as chickens, quail and turkeys where they can mutate into highly lethal forms. The "bird flu" H5N1 virus has mutated to a highly lethal form in poultry and now also has been associated with deaths in wild birds.
- Avian influenza viruses can occasionally be found among wild bird populations in North America and occasionally avian influenza viruses infect domestic poultry.
- To date, the H5N1 "bird flu" virus has not been detected in North America or the United States.
- There are two main routes of entry for migratory birds from Europe or Asia to introduce the virus to North America. Infected migratory birds from Europe may expose North American migratory birds in the Atlantic Flyway in Canada, or infected migratory birds from Asia may interact with North American birds in the Pacific Flyway in Alaska. Georgia is in the Atlantic Flyway and may be affected if birds in this flyway become infected from interactions in Canada, or from interactions with birds traveling between Alaska and the Chesapeake Bay.
- No live poultry, fresh poultry products, or other live bird imports from countries affected with avian influenza are legally allowed to enter the US.
- Pigeons are not associated with carriage of "bird flu" and are more resistant to infection when exposed to the virus than other species of birds.
- The most common goose in Georgia is the Canada goose, which is a resident species, meaning it does not migrate. Consequently, the Canada geese in Georgia are not at risk of "bird flu" at this time.

- Cats that eat infected birds have become infected and have died of “bird flu”. However, there is no evidence of efficient transfer of the “bird flu” virus between cats.

Monitoring for “Bird Flu” in Georgia:

- There is monitoring for avian influenza among shore birds, waterfowl, and poultry in the Southeast and Georgia. Other wild birds such as pigeons, songbirds, crows, or sparrows are not generally infected with avian influenza viruses, so it is not beneficial to include them in a surveillance program.
- The Georgia Department of Public Health is not collecting dead birds for H5N1 testing at this time. Please see the following section entitled, “What to do if you find a dead bird” at the end of this document for bird testing information.
- Dead cats are not part of surveillance in Georgia because of the low risk of infection and transmission.

Human Risk of “Bird Flu”:

- Birds infected with H5N1 shed large amounts of virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. The H5N1 virus is spread between birds through contact with an infected bird’s saliva, nasal secretions, or feces. Human illness has resulted from direct contact with infected birds and their feces or with environments contaminated with infected bird feces. Most commonly this contact has been during the preparation of live, infected birds for human consumption.
- The “bird flu” virus (H5N1) does not spread easily from birds to humans and the number of people that have become ill with “bird flu” is very small considering the size and duration of the outbreak among domestic birds in affected countries and the large number of persons who have probably been exposed.
- There have been no human “bird flu” infections as a result of human contact with cats. Cat infections have been very rare.
- There is no human risk of “bird flu” from eating processed chicken products.

What to do if you find a dead bird:

- Personally owned birds: Questions about any sick or dead birds that you own (i.e. pet birds) should be referred to your veterinarian for consultation. There is currently little to no risk of H5N1 in pet birds. However, pet birds have been found positive for WNV.
- Waterfowl or shore birds (e.g. ducks, geese, seagulls, etc): Birds of these species have become sick in affected countries (i.e. countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa) with the “bird flu” virus and may have contributed to the spread of the virus between these continents.

Questions regarding dead waterfowl or shore birds should be directed to your regional Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildlife Biologist (<http://www.georgiawildlife.com/about/contact>).

- Birds of prey (e.g. falcons, hawks, eagles, etc): Birds of prey may become infected with the “bird flu” virus if they feed on infected birds. However, they can also be infected with WNV. Questions about these birds should also be directed to a regional Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildlife Biologist (<http://www.georgiawildlife.com/about/contact>), and they will decide if the bird should be tested for “bird flu” or WNV.
- Songbirds and other wild birds (e.g. pigeons, cardinals, crows, wrens, etc): These birds do not typically carry avian influenza viruses; nor are they associated with spreading the virus in Asia, Europe or Africa. These calls should be referred to your County Environmental Health Offices (<http://dph.georgia.gov/sites/dph.georgia.gov/files/EnvHealth/ContactInformation.pdf>) in reference to WNV.
- Dead chickens or other poultry (e.g. quail, turkeys, chickens): Questions regarding sick or dead poultry should be directed to the closest Georgia Poultry Laboratory (map and contact info at end of this document). If more than approximately 20 poultry on the same premises are sick or dead, the Georgia Department of Agriculture State Veterinarian or the USDA Area Veterinarian in Charge should be notified for a potential investigation by a Veterinary Medical Officer.

<u>State Veterinarian’s Office</u> Bus Hrs 404-656-3667 800-282-5852 ext. 3667 Weekends/Eve 800-TRY-GEMA	<u>USDA Area Veterinarian’s Office</u> 770-922-7860 (24/7)
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HANDLING DEAD BIRDS

Dead birds should be avoided except when necessary for testing or disposal. If you need to handle a dead bird, please follow the directions below.

- Wear gloves.
- Put hand(s) in a plastic bag turned inside out and pick up the bird using the plastic bag. Turn bag right side out over the bird and seal bag with bird inside
- Place bag with bird in a second plastic bag.
- Seal outer bag and place in the refrigerator until bird(s) are picked up.
- Dispose of the gloves in another plastic bag.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.

References/Additional resources:

Southeastern Wildlife Disease Study

<http://www.vet.uga.edu/scwds/>

Georgia Department of Public Health

<http://dph.georgia.gov/>

Georgia Department of Agriculture - Georgia Response Plan for HPAI in Poultry

<http://agr.georgia.gov/georgia-response-plan-for-hpai-in-poultry-.aspx>

U.S. Geological Survey

<http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome>

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

<http://www.georgiawildlife.com>