



Important Public Health Alert : Avian Influenza and Hunting Birds

To: Chiefs, Health Directors, Pandemic Leads

Date: April 13, 2023

There has been a recent media report of a dog eating a dead goose, then becoming ill and dying as a result of an Avian influenza (bird flu) infection. This is an extremely rare event, but it reminds us that there are some important things to think about when hunting and handling birds.

Avian influenza – often called “bird flu” – is a viral infection that is highly contagious among birds. It is found in domestic poultry (like chickens) and wild birds such as raptors, gulls, terns, shorebirds, ducks, geese and others. Wild birds and waterfowl in Canada and throughout the world carry Avian influenza viruses. The highest risk of exposure to Avian influenza is when migratory birds are travelling south for the winter or returning home in the spring. These viruses typically cause little or no harm to most birds. However, some strains of Avian influenza can make birds extremely sick and possibly also make humans sick.

The risk of humans getting Avian influenza viruses is low, and there is no evidence to suggest that the Avian influenza virus can be transmitted to humans when eating fully cooked game birds or eggs. While the recent news stories of Avian influenza infections should not affect plans for hunting birds this spring, below are precautions that hunters can take to minimize risks when hunting and handling wild birds or collecting their eggs:

- wash hands often (or use hand sanitizer) when handling birds or eggs, and before eating or smoking;
- wear protective clothing such as boots when walking into nesting sites and disposable gloves when handling birds and when picking up and brushing off eggs;
- limit contact with blood, feces or secretions of harvested birds and when finished, clean work surfaces thoroughly with soap and water followed by diluted household bleach;
- ensure that birds and eggs are fully cooked before eating;
- if you become ill after handling wild birds or eggs, seek medical attention and let your health care provider know that you were handling wild birds.

If you have any questions on the risks from Avian influenza and how to protect yourself, please contact me.

Respectfully,

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This advice is intended to supplement, not replace, the advice of local public health authorities.