

## [HPAI \[Avian Flu\] In Domesticated Ruminants: FAQ](#)

From The Open Sanctuary Project

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*Recent detections of highly pathogenic avian influenza ("HPAI") have been alarming caregivers. Please read on to learn more.*



With the recent detections of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in domesticated ruminants, caregivers are likely wondering what this latest development means and how they can continue to keep their residents safe. This is an evolving situation, and so, unfortunately, there is much we do not know. In this resource, we'll discuss the current situation as of March 29, 2024 and do our best to answer some of the questions that are coming up as a result of these detections of HPAI in domesticated ruminants. We

will update reports of ongoing detections in the toggle box above, and provide additional guidance as information develops.

### What Is Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza?

Avian influenza refers to any disease or infection in birds caused by Type A influenza viruses. Virus strains are categorized as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) or low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI.) Most Type A influenza viruses are low pathogenic, found worldwide, and can frequently be found in apparently healthy migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. In domesticated birds, low pathogenic AI viruses typically have low morbidity and mortality rates. HPAI, however, carries a high morbidity and mortality rate.

Highly pathogenic Eurasian H5 avian influenza was detected in wild birds in early 2022 after not being detected in a wild bird in the United States since 2016, and shortly afterward, HPAI was detected at a commercial turkey farm. Since the start of the current outbreak, every state except Hawaii has had confirmed cases of HPAI in wild and/or domesticated birds. For more information on current cases, please refer to the USDA APHIS website.

### Where Can I Find Your Existing Advice On HPAI?

You can learn more about HPAI in our full resource on the subject [here](#). If you need a quick refresher, or some easily digestible information, you can find our FAQ on the subject [here](#). For infographics that you can use at your sanctuary to remind staff and volunteers of precautions you should take, you can find those [here](#).

### What Are The Recent Developments With HPAI In Domesticated Ruminants?

As of this writing, there have been reports of HPAI in domesticated ruminants in four U.S. states – Minnesota, Kansas, Texas, and Idaho. While these are the first reported cases in domesticated ruminants in the U.S., they are not the first cases in mammals. Since 2022, the USDA has tracked over 200 detections of HPAI in mammals. You can find more information about these detections [here](#), and also above in our toggle box which will list all recent updates that either state or federal agencies have confirmed. To find an FAQ from the USDA on recent detections, please click [here](#).

### What Does This Mean For Sanctuaries?

We don't yet know whether we will see more domesticated ruminants affected by HPAI, but these detections highlight the fact that HPAI continues to be a major threat. While it is certainly concerning that domesticated ruminants are now being affected, it's important to remember that farmed bird species face a two-pronged threat from this disease.

Not only are they at risk from the disease itself (which carries a high mortality rate in birds such as chickens and [turkeys](#). Unless explicitly mentioned, we are referring to domesticated turkey breeds, not wild turkeys, who may have unique needs not covered by this resource.), but they are also at risk of regional efforts to control disease spread via the compulsory killing of birds on an affected premise (for more information on the legal implications of an HPAI detection in domesticated birds on your property, check out our comprehensive resource [here](#), or you can find our FAQ on the subject of HPAI and the law [here](#)). Given the significant risk to farmed bird species, caregivers must continue to take appropriate steps to protect their avian residents (which you can read more about [here](#)).

Caregivers, understandably, want to know what these recent developments mean for the domesticated ruminants in their care. Unfortunately, there's still a lot we don't know. Federal and state agencies are conducting additional testing to better understand the current situation, and haven't shared much more than the information we've shared here. We want to avoid speculating or sharing information that is inaccurate or misinterpreted, so we're going to stick to sharing from official sources and updating reported detections from these sources in the toggle box above.

It does appear that individuals with a weakened or immature immune system are believed to be most at risk of HPAI, and this would explain why the newborn goat kids on the Minnesota farm were affected but the adults were not. In the [cow](#) While "cow" can be defined to refer exclusively to female cattle, at The Open Sanctuary Project we refer to domesticated cattle of all ages and sexes as "cows." cases in Texas and Kansas, only about 10% of the cows in affected herds became sick and affected cows recovered with supportive care. So far, there have been no confirmed deaths associated with HPAI in cows. While the best case scenario would be for domesticated ruminants not to be affected at all by HPAI, this current data suggests that domesticated ruminants are not impacted as significantly as chickens, turkeys, and other farmed bird species, though clearly newborns, who have an immature immune system, are at risk of serious, and potentially fatal disease. However, without knowing more about the care these goat kids received (for example, did they receive colostrum, were they born into a clean environment, did they receive immediate veterinary care, etc.), it's hard to know if the severity of the disease seen in the goat kids was impacted by other factors or not.

In addition to the details described above, it's also worth pointing out that to date, the governmental response to these detections has been very different from the current response to detections in farmed bird species. Whereas a positive detection in a farmed bird will result in the compulsory killing of all domesticated birds on the premise, the information shared suggests that positive detections in domesticated ruminants are handled differently.

We can typically look to the USDA's Red Book Response Plans for information about what governmental agencies will do if certain diseases are detected, but [the HPAI Red Book](#) offers only very general guidance regarding HPAI in species other than "poultry," stating simply that infected animals will be "appropriately monitored" and that other measures may be applied. While this may be good news for our ruminant residents, we do worry about what a positive detection in a ruminant would mean for avian residents, should there also happen to be avians on the property.

## **What Should Sanctuaries Do?**

Given that this is still a developing situation, one of the most important things to do is to stay informed. We recommend watching for updates from the [USDA](#), [AVMA](#), and your [state's board of animal health](#). Additionally, we recommend contacting your veterinarian for more information. They will likely be your best source of information and can offer more specific guidance as the situation develops based on the specifics of your sanctuary and your region.

We encourage sanctuaries to revisit their [biosecurity plan](#) (or to create one if they haven't already). If you care for birds, you absolutely need to be taking steps to protect your residents. If your animal sanctuary is located in an area where [avian influenza](#) is currently a concern, keeping detailed, accurate records of the steps you're taking to prevent its spread at your organization is critical, should the virus be detected nearby. To help organizations stay organized in their HPAI recordkeeping, we've developed a simple spreadsheet with sections for some of the key tasks caregivers must perform to keep their avian residents safe. [Check out our HPAI biosecurity plan and checklist for more information on these strategies!](#)

In addition to preventing direct and indirect contact with wild birds, if you currently house avian and mammal species together (or if you give them separate access to the same spaces), we recommend you take immediate steps to house them separately.

While it's unlikely that sanctuaries can prevent all direct and indirect contact between their ruminant residents and wild birds, it's a good idea to look at your current practices and see if there are things you can do to lessen this exposure. For example, consider if there are ways you can protect drinking water from possible contamination from wild birds. Even if you can't fully exclude wild birds, perhaps you can take steps to lessen the risk. For example, if you have a water trough under a tree, perhaps you can move it to another area where wild birds are less likely to congregate (and possibly defecate in the water). Ponds and other natural bodies of water are potential sources of exposure, so it's wise to restrict your residents' access to these water sources.

Because the current data suggests that very young neonatal ruminants are most vulnerable, if you rescue very young neonatal ruminants or are caring for pregnant ruminants, we recommend talking to your veterinarian about additional measures you can implement to reduce the chance of vulnerable babies being exposed to HPAI.

Robust **quarantine.** **The policy or space in which an individual is separately housed away from others as a preventative measure to protect other residents from potentially contagious health conditions, such as in the case of new residents or residents who may have been exposed to certain diseases.** is always important when taking in new residents, and given all the unknowns with this current situation, it's even more important to ensure you are doing all you can to prevent the spread of disease from new rescues to other residents. You can read more about quarantine [here](#).

## **SOURCES:**

**Advanced Topics In Resident Health: Avian Influenza (Vet Reviewed) | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**Avian Influenza FAQ | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**Avian Influenza Infographic | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza: Your Sanctuary And The Law | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza And The Law: FAQ For Animal Sanctuaries And Rescues | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**HPAI Record-Keeping Template | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**HPAI Biosecurity. Merck Veterinary Manual defines biosecurity as "the implementation of measures that reduce the risk of the introduction and spread of disease agents [pathogens]." Plan & Checklist | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**Agricultural Cooperative Extension Services: What Can They Do For Animal Sanctuaries | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**Biosecurity Part 2: Creating And Implementing A Biosecurity Plan | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**Establishing A Safe And Effective Quarantine Policy | The Open Sanctuary Project**

**HPAI / APHIS Website | U.S. Department Of Agriculture *(Non-Compassionate Source)***

**HPAI / OIE Website | U.S. Department Of Agriculture *(Non-Compassionate Source)***

**2022-2024 Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Mammals | U.S. Department Of Agriculture *(Non-Compassionate Source)***

**AVMA News | American Veterinary Medical Association *(Non-Compassionate Source)***

**Detection Of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza In Dairy Herds: Frequently Asked Questions | U.S. Department of Agriculture *(Non-Compassionate Source)***