NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Bird Flu in Dairy Cattle FAQs

Q: What is this I'm hearing about "bird flu" in dairy cows? Is that even possible?

A: Yes. Not only possible, but it has been detected in dairy cattle in multiple states in the country, but does not, to date, include New Jersey. Avian influenza ("bird flu"), in its many forms, is a naturally occurring disease that is typically carried by wild, migratory birds, some of which carry the disease but don't develop symptoms. Wild birds can then pass it along to poultry operations (which wild birds may access easily and are drawn to when the poultry or other livestock are fed). This particularly applies to backyard flocks and livestock that are kept out in the open, as compared to larger operations where the poultry and livestock are typically housed or fed in buildings, which can be tougher for wild birds to access.

Q: But how does a COW get BIRD flu?

A: Avian Influenza (AI or "bird flu") is a virus which has multiple strains. Some, but not all, virus strains are zoonotic. Zoonotic refers to diseases caused by germs spread between animals and people. Changes in how the virus and its host interact could lead to infection of a new animal species.

Q: Has it jumped to other species?

A: The virus has been found naturally occurring in at least 21 (not including humans) mammal species in the USA since 2022. Many more have been experimentally infected, and others have been found outside of the USA. To date, there have been outdoor barn cats on dairy farms infected and dying after they drank raw milk that, it is believed, came from one of the infected dairy cows on that farm.

Q: So, is milk safe to drink?

A: Yes, **PASTEURIZED** milk is safe to drink. Tests on pasteurized milk have shown remnants of avian influenza present, but not in a viable form that could infect someone. Milk from sick cows is being diverted or destroyed. Cases of affected cats on dairy farms suggest that a **viable virus** remained in the RAW milk, which the cats may have drank, leading to the infection of the cats.

Q: Have any humans been infected?

A: Yes, rare infection of humans in the US has been reported by CDC. These were related to close contact with either infected domestic poultry or dairy cattle and resulted in minor symptoms only. Additional information from the CDC on these human cases can be found here: https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html

Q: What is being done about this?

A: The USDA, working with other federal and state agencies, are using **coordinated testing** and **prevention protocols** to try to stem the spread of bird flu through dairy cattle. This includes coordinating the availability of personal protective equipment for workers interacting with cows. Milk from dairy cows that test positive or show symptoms is not added into the commercial dairy supply. Lactating cows being moved between states MUST be tested unless they are directly destined to slaughter.

Q: Is New Jersey doing this?

A: New Jersey is a highly proactive state regarding animal health, especially among those being moved between states. Even before this outbreak, New Jersey required a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) and tests for other diseases to which cattle are prone (such as brucellosis) for cattle entering the state that are not directly destined for slaughter. The bird flu testing has been added to that protocol for lactating dairy cattle moving into New Jersey.

Q: What happens to cows that get bird flu?

A: While bird flu can be widely contagious and highly fatal to birds, it does not cause the same level of severe disease or mortality in cattle. Infected dairy cows typically will be sick for a time and recover uneventfully.

Q: What are New Jersey dairy farms doing to protect it's cattle?

A: Dairy farmers are working with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health to constantly **monitor dairy cattle** for any symptoms and, if symptoms are detected, removing those cattle from milk production. Dairy farmers also are being diligent regarding biosecurity in order to reduce the risk of a virus entering their premises.

Q: Then, what about Avian Influenza in cattle that go to slaughter? Couldn't the disease spread through the meat people eat?

A: Not if the meat is cooked to the recommended minimum temperature (165 degrees Fahrenheit). Thoroughly cooking the meat kills the virus. All meat is recommended to be cooked to a safe internal temperature prior to eating it. Cooking to a safe internal temperature kills bacteria and viruses in the meat. All meat sold through commercial supply undergoes a meat inspection process to help protect consumers. Specific recommendations are available online at: Safe Minimum Internal Temperature Chart | Food Safety and Inspection Service

Q: How long has this strain of bird flu been circulating?

A: Historically, Avian Influenza outbreaks have occurred across a short time span associated with the migratory flyways of wild birds, and several years may pass before another outbreak. The last major outbreak impacting poultry in the United States, prior to 2022, was in 2016. The outbreak in wild birds that was first detected in North America in 2022 and continues today resulted in

millions of birds nationwide having to be euthanized, and has demonstrated a more constant threat, with more public attention being paid to it now due to the jump into dairy cows.

Q: What can the average person do to slow the spread of bird flu in all animals?

A: Keep animals (pets, poultry and other livestock) from having contact with wild birds or their excrement. Anything that can be done to limit interaction with potentially infected wild birds is a good start.

Poultry and livestock owners should call the NJDA if their animals are experiencing undiagnosed symptoms or increased deaths.

NJDA Division of Animal Health 609-671-6400