



County of Santa Cruz



HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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SITUATIONAL UPDATE

To: Santa Cruz County Healthcare Providers
From: Lisa B. Hernandez, MD, MPH, County Health Officer
Subject: H5N1 Situational Update
Date: 12/26/2024

H5N1 Situational Update

State Response:

As of Wednesday 12/18/24, the California Governor's office declared a [state of emergency related to H5N1 bird flu](#). This action was particularly spurred by detection of infected dairy cows in Southern California, outside of previously known spread within the Central Valley. Human cases have also continued to rise in California, with 36 confirmed human cases in the state (35 of which were dairy workers). There continues to be no evidence of person-to-person spread, and nearly all infected individuals had exposure to infected cattle. **The current risk to the general public remains low.**

The stated motivation of this emergency declaration is to support the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) in their investigation and testing of animals by providing flexibility for staffing and contracting under the state of emergency. State officials do not anticipate any additional impacts at the level of local public health and healthcare systems.

Local Response:

Locally in Santa Cruz County, there are no known human or animal cases of H5N1. There are no current local health orders or preventative actions requested from healthcare providers related to H5N1. County Public Health has been working over the past year to prepare for H5N1, including efforts in surveillance, communication, and coordination with local partners.

Over the past two months, there have been intermittent wastewater detections of H5N1 at both the City of Santa Cruz and Watsonville wastewater surveillance sites. County Public Health has worked with the state to investigate these positive detections and concluded they were most likely due to infected milk from the Central Valley being purchased locally and occasionally dumped into the Santa Cruz sewer shed.

Raw milk products from multiple California farms (Raw Farm LLC and Valley Milk Simply Bottled) have recently been [recalled](#) due to H5N1 detected in samples. Some of these products were distributed to retailers in Santa Cruz County, and County Environmental Health has been working to ensure that these products are removed from shelves. There is some evidence to suggest possible transmission of disease to humans via consumption of raw milk. County Public Health is disseminating messaging on the risks of consuming raw milk products, such as the following on [social media](#):

“Choosing pasteurized milk and dairy foods is the best way to safely enjoy the nutritional benefits of milk and avoid getting sick. Drinking raw milk can lead to serious health risks. Pasteurization inactivates the bird flu virus and harmful germs that can cause illness.

Learn more at: go.cdph.ca.gov/rawmilk”

Information for Providers

- *Clinical Presentation*: most human cases have presented with mild symptoms
 - Upper respiratory symptoms (cough, sore throat, congestion)
 - Conjunctivitis
 - Risk Factors: exposure to infected animals or consumption of raw milk

- For patients with signs/symptoms of acute respiratory illness or conjunctivitis with exposure to potentially infected animals, people, or materials (including raw milk):
 - Isolate patient and implement standard, contact, and airborne precautions
 - Initiate empiric antiviral treatment as soon as possible

- Oseltamivir (twice daily for 5 days) – *regardless of symptom onset timeframe* **OR**
- Baloxavir (single dose) – *option if <48 hours from symptom onset*

- Notify Santa Cruz County Public Health ASAP by phone
 - **Weekdays 8 AM-5 PM:** (831) 454-4838
 - **Holidays/Outside Business Hours:** (831) 471-1170

- Collect respiratory specimens for H5N1 testing at a public health lab
 - Nasopharyngeal swab AND nasopharyngeal swab with oropharyngeal swab (two swabs in one vial)
 - If conjunctivitis, collect conjunctival swab

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