

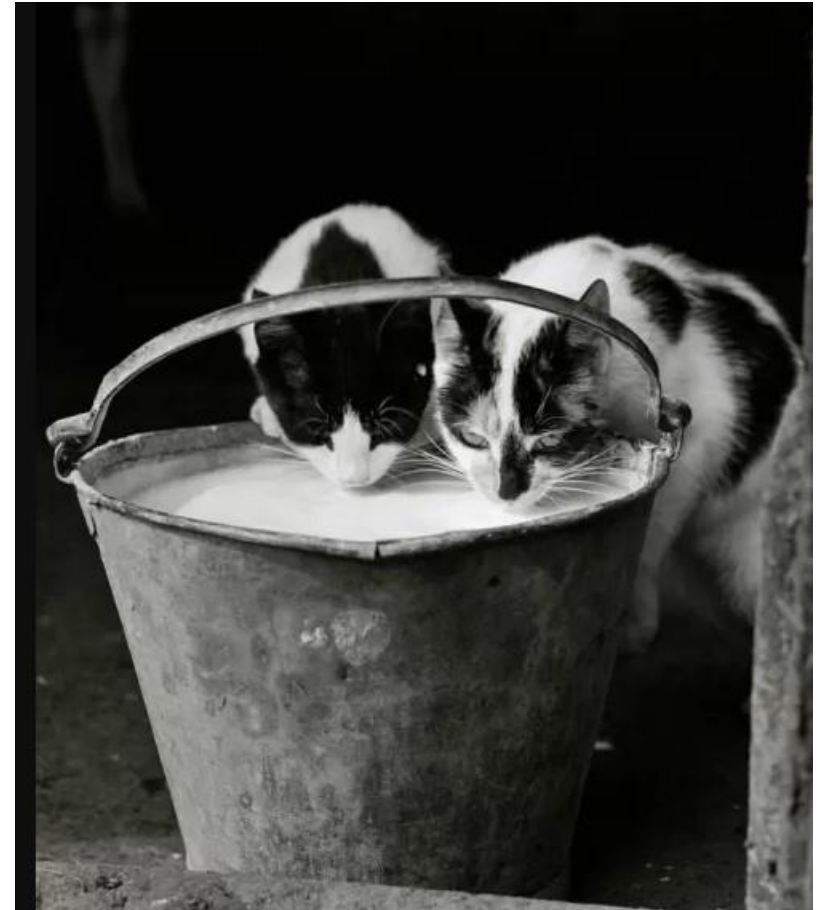
# How Much Do You Know About Bird Flu?

Cynda Crawford, DVM, PhD

Fredrica Saltzman Endowed Professorship Chair in Shelter Medicine

Julie Levy, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, DABVP (Shelter Practice)

Fran Marino Endowed Distinguished Professor of Shelter Medicine Education



<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/two-cats-drinking-milk-from-a-pail-1946-1980-artist-john-news-photo/918905036>

# What is bird flu?

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- Bird flu = H5N1 avian influenza virus
- Natural hosts = wild birds, ducks/geese, poultry
- Highly pathogenic in natural hosts
- First discovered in 1996 in geese in China
- H5N1 flu infection of birds/poultry around the world for 29 years
- U.S. – infected wild birds, ducks/geese, commercial poultry farms, and backyard flocks in all 50 states since 2022



<https://fox11online.com/newsletter-daily/howard-officials-report-bird-flu-resurgence-after-dozens-of-dead-geese-found-in-quarry-duck-creek-quarry-avian-flu-wisconsin-dnr>

# What is bird flu?

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- Expansion of H5N1 avian flu host range to mammals
  - rodents, raccoons, rabbits, bears, coyotes, foxes, seals, sea lions
- 2024: H5N1 infection of dairy cattle in the US
  - nearly 1000 herds in 16 states
  - virus concentrated in the mammary gland
  - milk contains large amount of virus



<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-01221-2>

# Can cats catch bird flu?

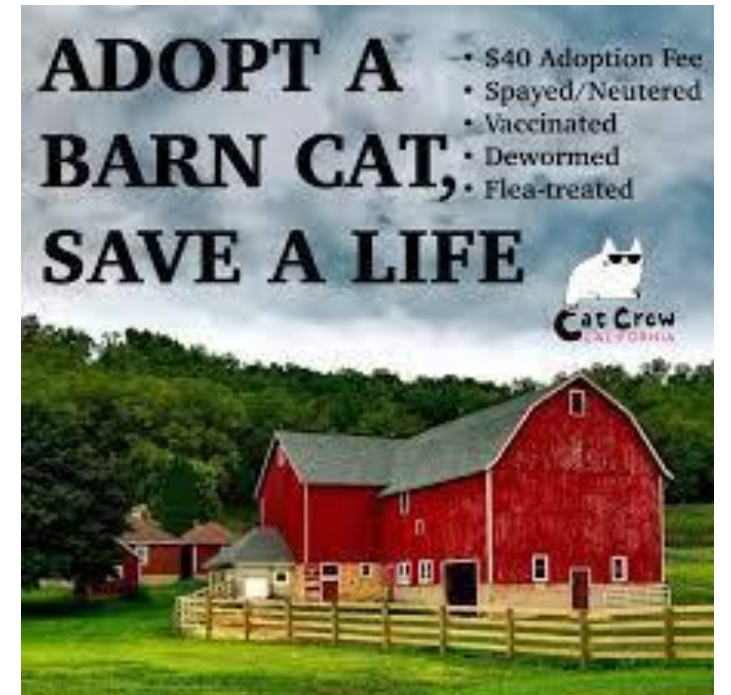
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- Cats are susceptible to H5N1 avian flu infection
  - Domestic cats, exotic cats (tigers, lions, leopards), wild cats (mountain lions, bobcats)
- 2004 – 1st confirmed case of H5N1 flu in cats
  - 14 housecats in Thailand were fed raw infected chickens
  - Thousands of infected cats in Asia and Europe since 2004
- 2022/2023 – 1st cases of H5N1-infected cats in the US
  - Outdoor cats with access to H5N1-infected poultry farms in MT, NE, OR, SD, WY



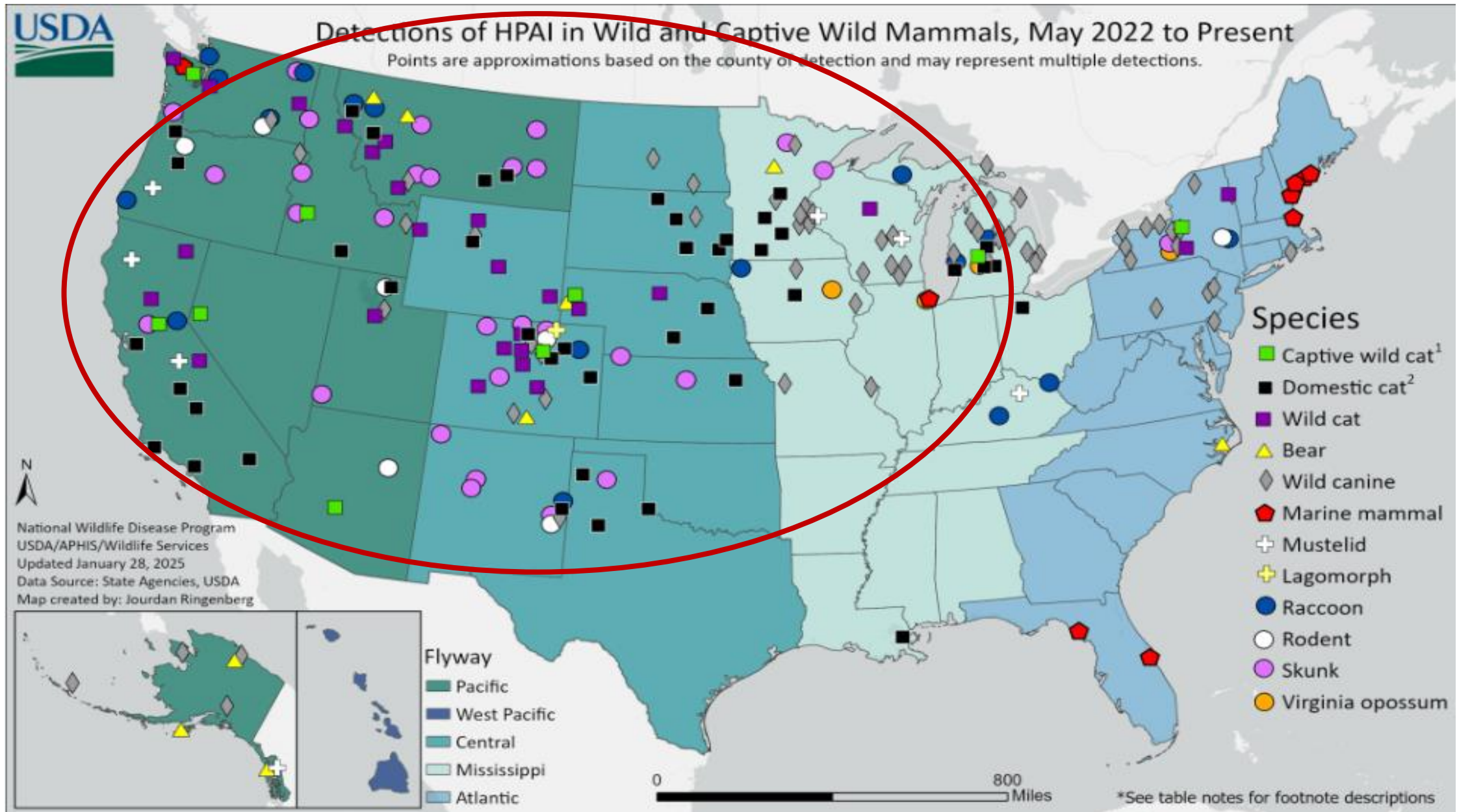
# Can cats catch bird flu?

- 102 confirmed cats with H5N1 infection 16 states from Jan 2024 to Jan 2025 \*
  - 25 cats with outdoor access or feral cats
    - 3 cats lived on H5N1-infected dairy farms
    - 22 with unknown source of exposure (not on farms)
  - 43 barn cats on H5N1-infected dairy/poultry farms
  - 20 indoor-only cats fed unpasteurized milk or raw poultry-based pet food
  - 14 cats with no reported lifestyle or exposure sources



<https://www.instagram.com/catcrewcalifornia/p/DFGJudXPg40/>

\* <https://wahis.woah.org/#/in-review/4451?reportId=171725&fromPage=event-dashboard-url>





# What cats are at risk for bird flu?

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- Cats with outdoor access, particularly in geographic locations where H5N1 flu virus is infecting birds and mammals
- Cats living on dairy farms, poultry farms, or with backyard flocks
- Exposure to dairy or poultry farmworkers and their clothing



<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-13366941/bird-flu-symptoms-cats-blind-raw-milk-texas.html>



[https://www.reddit.com/r/homestead/comments/15z6x1z/barn\\_cat\\_question/](https://www.reddit.com/r/homestead/comments/15z6x1z/barn_cat_question/)

# What cats are at risk for bird flu?

- Cats with access to mice and dead birds in geographic locations where H5N1 flu virus is infecting birds and mammals



<https://www.npr.org/2013/01/29/170588511/>  
Photograph: Vasily Vishnevskiy/Alamy



<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/avian-influenza-bird-flu/usda-reports-more-h5n1-detections-mice-and-cats>

**World Organisation for Animal Health** @WOAH

#Iceland reported an outbreak of #AvianInfluenza in cats via #WAHIS. Three cats (one adult female and two 10 week old kittens) from the same household died after they had been ill for only a few days. The most probable source of infection is likely to have been infected wild birds. More information: [wahis.woah.org/#/in-review/61...](https://wahis.woah.org/#/in-review/61...)

WAHIS NOTIFICATION

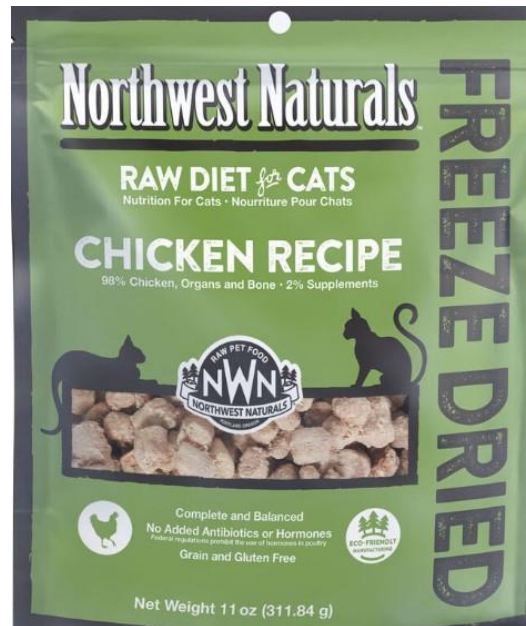
**Avian influenza in cats in Iceland**

2/13/25. <https://x.com/WOAH/status/1878861887137361962>



# What cats are at risk for bird flu?

- Consumption of unpasteurized dairy products, raw poultry-based pet food, undercooked poultry
  - Local manufacturers in geographic “hot spots” for H5N1-infected cows and poultry



<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=557199813095845&set=d41c8cd9>

# What are the symptoms in infected cats?

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- Severe neurological disease that mimics rabies
  - Disorientation
  - Blind
  - Circling
  - Wobbly gait
  - Paralysis
  - Seizures
- Severe respiratory disease
  - Copious nasal discharge, cough, open-mouth breathing
  - Struggling to breathe/rapid breathing due to pneumonia
- Milder URI with recovery? Infected but no symptoms?

# What factors define suspect cats?

- Combination of risk factors:
  - Geographical “hotspots” for H5N1 flu infection in birds, poultry, cows, other mammals
  - Cat lifestyle
    - Dairy and poultry farm cats
    - Cats with outdoor access
    - Cats consuming unpasteurized dairy products or raw poultry-based pet food
  - Severe neurological or respiratory infections or both
  - Die-offs in community cat colonies



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/21652620@N08/4347479850>



# How are suspect cats diagnosed?

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- Cannot diagnose based on clinical signs
  - Clinical signs overlap with more common causes of neurological and respiratory infections
- Requires PCR testing by state and/or national veterinary diagnostic labs
  - Postmortem exam with testing for rabies and H5N1 avian flu virus
  - Throat (oropharynx) swabs from cats with respiratory signs. This is likely too dangerous for cats with neuro signs due to possibility of rabies!

# Can cats spread infection to other cats?

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- Some evidence for cat-to-cat spread of H5N1 in Asia and Europe from 2004 to 2012
- Early experimental studies demonstrated limited spread of H5N1 between cats
- No published evidence of cat-to-cat spread of infection in the US but this is being closely monitored

# Can cats spread infection to people?

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- No evidence for cat-to-human spread of infection but this possibility is being closely monitored
- 67 confirmed human cases in the US in 2024
  - linked to contact with infected dairy cattle or poultry
  - 1 person in Louisiana died from infection acquired from his backyard flock.
- No published evidence of human-to-human spread of infection since 2007 in Asia
- No published evidence for human-to-cat transmission



# Want to know more?

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- Recommendations for monitoring and response to possible infections with avian influenza type A (H5N1) in cats for shelters, rescues, and access-to-care clinics. <https://sheltermedicine.wisc.edu/recommendations-for-monitoring-and-response-to-possible-infections-with-avian-influenza-type-a-h5n1-in-cats-for-shelters-rescues-and-access-to-care-clinics/>
- CDC. What Causes Bird Flu in Pets and Other Animals. <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/virus-transmission/avian-in-other-animals.html>
- CDC. Considerations for Veterinarians: Evaluating and Handling of Cats Potentially Exposed to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza A(H5N1) Virus. <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/hcp/animals/index.html>
- AVMA. Avian influenza A (H5N1) in cats. <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-health/avian-influenza/avian-influenza-h5n1-cats>
- APHIS/USDA. Detections of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Mammals. <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/mammals>