

State of Alaska  
**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

**Frank H. Murkowski**  
Governor  
P.O. Box 110001  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0001  
**NEWS RELEASE**



**John Manly**  
Press Spokesman  
**907-465-3500**  
**FAX: 907-465-3532**  
[www.gov.state.ak.us](http://www.gov.state.ak.us)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 13, 2006

No. 06-110

**DEC Environmental Health Lab Approved to Test Avian Influenza and State Veterinarian's Authorities Broadened**

(Anchorage) — Governor Frank H. Murkowski today announced that the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Environmental Health Laboratory is now approved to perform Avian Influenza (bird flu) testing.

“This is a very good step forward for Alaska, because we are at the forefront of any epidemic that is likely to hit the U.S.,” Murkowski said. “With the millions of migrating birds between Asia and North America through the flyway that includes our state, it is vitally important that we be able to test for bird flu expeditiously. The certification of our lab means samples can be tested in hours, rather than the days it would take to send them outside to the lower 48.”

Approval to test for bird flu required a rigorous review of operating procedures and sample processing methods, extensive staff training, analysis of unknown samples, and a federal inspection. The National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) approval means that the lab, which has only been open for six months, can immediately begin testing bird flu samples. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratories to have the NAHLN certification prior to testing animals for bird flu.

The certification assures test results from Alaska's facility are handled in a safe manner and are valid and reliable. The Environmental Health Laboratory will use the molecular procedure commonly referred to as polymerase chain reaction to test for the H5 and H7 subtypes of bird flu.

“Achieving Avian Influenza certification status is a milestone,” said DEC Division of Environmental Health Director Kristin Ryan. “It reinforces the state's commitment to respond to this threat. It is also a testament to the hard work and competence of our laboratory staff. We look forward to playing a key role in the joint state and federal efforts to monitor for Avian Influenza in our wild and domestic birds.”

According to the USDA, there are currently 47 state-funded laboratories approved to conduct bird flu surveillance testing nationwide. The laboratories work in partnership with the National Veterinary Services Laboratories that serves as the national reference laboratory and conducts confirmatory testing necessary to diagnose animal diseases.

Governor Murkowski also signed HB 380 into law, which broadens the state veterinarian's ability to control animal diseases that threaten public safety. Up to this point, the state veterinarian has had to depend on animal owners to voluntarily isolate sick animals. Since over 75% of emerging infectious human diseases come from animals, Alaska needed a stronger animal health safety net. The combination of the new laboratory capacity and legal authority gives the state the tools it needs to keep Alaskans safe.

# # #