



**Alaska Departments of Health & Social Services, Fish & Game,
and Environmental Conservation**

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**ADF&G, DEC, and DHSS detail state preparations
regarding avian flu**

(Juneau, Alaska) — The Directors of Wildlife Conservation and Public Health and the State Veterinarian today provided detailed briefings to legislators regarding the State's cooperative and coordinated efforts regarding Asian H5N1 avian influenza, and introduced the state's new interagency website that provides Alaskans with a single source for all state information related to avian and pandemic flu.

“To date, H5N1 has never been found in Alaska or anywhere in North America, and there is no evidence that anyone, anywhere has caught it from a wild bird,” said Matt Robus, Fish & Game's Director of the Division of Wildlife Conservation. “At this point, there is no need to stop hunting and eating wild birds in Alaska. We are working closely with federal, state, and local officials to ensure that if the Asian H5N1 flu virus makes its way to Alaska, that it is detected early.”

Robus, Department of Environmental Conservation's State Veterinarian Bob Gerlach, and Department of Health and Social Services' Public Health Director Dr. Mandsager each spoke regarding steps their departments are taking to detect and respond to any appearance of Asian H5N1 avian flu in Alaska.

With the first migratory birds expected to arrive in the state within the next two weeks, Fish & Game and federal wildlife agencies are continuing to monitor migrating birds for the virus. Fish & Game, in conjunction with its federal partners, has published informational materials and provided information on the State interagency website regarding the Asian H5N1 avian flu, how to report sick or dead birds, and steps that hunters and subsistence food gatherers can take to protect themselves while in the field or while handling wild birds and game.

Both Environmental Conservation and Fish & Game officials gave warnings regarding boiling water, or properly washing berries, bird eggs or other vegetation for human consumption that may have been contaminated by bird droppings. They also stressed the need to cook meat all the way through to 165 degrees F (or until the juices run clear) to protect against all bacteria and viruses.

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Environmental Conservation is educating the public on how individuals can protect domestic birds — from backyard poultry flocks to parrots. Dr. Gerlach described symptoms to look for and what to do if Alaskans suspect they have a sick bird. “Bird owners are the first line of defense to protect their birds from avian influenza,” Gerlach said. Dr. Gerlach recommends that any sick birds be isolated immediately and access to the related flock be restricted. “If you find a sick or dead bird, and no obvious cause is apparent, do not touch it.” Dr. Gerlach stated. Instead, call 1-866-5brdflu (1-866-527-3358).

“The DEC Environmental Health laboratory is obtaining approval from USDA to test bird samples for Avian Influenza so that we can test samples as soon as April,” said Kristin Ryan, Director of the Division of Environmental Health. “It is essential that a facility in Alaska has the capacity to test bird sample results so we can quickly identify threats and protect public health.”

Departments of Fish and Game and Environmental Conservation are working with the Division of Public Health to prepare to respond to possible detection of Asian H5N1 avian flu in Alaska. Public Health has established a resource and referral phone line to have a single point of contact to respond to public health questions and concerns regarding human health concerns or planning for pandemic flu.

The Division of Public Health is planning for a potential flu pandemic if Asian H5N1 avian flu becomes transmittable between humans. “No one knows for sure when the next pandemic may strike or whether or not it will be related to the current Asian H5N1 avian flu virus,” Dr. Mandsager said. “Now is the right time to plan for the complex issues and serious impacts that a new influenza pandemic could cause in Alaska. The more Alaskans who understand the issues and participate in the planning — whether it is at the personal, community or state level — the better off we all will be should a pandemic or another disaster strike.”

More information regarding the avian flu and pandemic flu is available at a single location, provided by all three departments to ensure consistent information is available to Alaskans: www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov or www.avianflu.alaska.gov. To report dead or sick birds, where no obvious cause is apparent, call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hotline at 1-866-5-BRDFLU (1-866-527-3358). The Public Health pandemic flu phone line will be operational Thursday, March 30, and will be 1-888-9Panflu (1-888-972-6358). Anchorage residents can call the local line: (907) 334-2292.