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MDC encourages public to use caution amidst suspected avian influenza outbreak

DECEMBER 11TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

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The Department is investigating numerous reports of sick and dead waterfowl across Missouri.

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is monitoring reports of sick and dead waterfowl, such as geese and ducks, across the state. The Department is actively collecting birds to determine the cause of illness but suspects highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) to be the cause. Other states, including Kansas and Iowa, are experiencing similar occurrences.

Avian influenza, commonly referred to as bird flu, spreads as birds along the North American flyways intermingle with infected birds from Europe and Asia. The viruses are transmitted from bird to bird through fecal droppings, saliva, and nasal discharges. There is a risk for spillover from wild birds into domestic poultry and then back again from poultry to wild birds, resulting in further spread.

Though HPAI does not present an immediate public health concern, MDC recommends the following:

- Do not touch dead geese, waterfowl, or other bird species.
- Report any sightings of dead geese to MDC online at <http://short.mdc.mo.gov/4KD>
- Ensure that pets do not come into contact with dead animals to help prevent the spread of disease.
- If you have inadvertently come into contact with a dead goose, wash your hands thoroughly and contact a healthcare professional if you experience any unusual symptoms.

Due to ongoing waterfowl hunting seasons, waterfowl hunters should dress game birds in the field whenever possible or at a location away from poultry or other birds. Hunters should also properly dispose of harvest waste by placing the remains in trash bags and disposing of them through trash collection or a permitted landfill. Bald eagles and other raptors are particularly susceptible to avian influenza. This simple action could help prevent

bald eagle and other raptor mortalities.

Hunters should also be aware it is possible to transport avian influenza viruses on boats, waders, or other equipment, especially if it isn't dry before moving it from one site to another. Allowing hunting equipment to dry between outings will reduce this chance.

Avian influenza does not present an immediate public health concern, though on rare occasions it has infected humans and other animals. It is safe to eat poultry and wild game as normal cooking temperatures are hot enough to kill the virus if present. Meat should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

More information can be found on the Missouri Department of Agriculture website at <https://agriculture.mo.gov/avian-influenza.php>.

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