

133 Molesworth Street  
PO Box 5013  
Wellington 6140  
New Zealand  
T+64 4 496 2000

2 April 2025

s 9(2)(a)

Ref: H2025063059

Tēnā koe s 9(2)(a)

### Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora (the Ministry) on 12 March 2025 for information regarding avian influenza. You requested:

*“Kia ora, I would like to know what steps the ministry of health are taking to mitigate risks of the avian/bird flu/H5N1  
I've seen the reports of cases in the United States including a death and want to know if the ministry health is doing anything proactively to mitigate risks and if they have a plan for what they will do if it starts spreading to people in Aotearoa and especially if was to start spreading from person to person.”*

Health agencies (including the Ministry of Health and Health New Zealand) have been working closely with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the Department of Conservation on plans to mitigate the impact of highly pathogenic avian influenza, including the H5N1 strain, if and when it arrives in New Zealand. General information about the work MPI is doing is on their website, if you are interested: [www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/pest-and-disease-threats-to-new-zealand/animal-disease-threats-to-new-zealand/high-pathogenicity-avian-influenza/](http://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/pest-and-disease-threats-to-new-zealand/animal-disease-threats-to-new-zealand/high-pathogenicity-avian-influenza/)

Our recent experience of COVID-19 means that healthcare services in New Zealand are well equipped and trained to respond effectively to new infectious diseases, including H5N1. The health system also helped MPI to respond to the H7N6 cases detected in a poultry farm in Otago last year. This has provided valuable experience that will help inform any health system response to a future avian influenza outbreak.

At this stage there are no reported, or suspected, animal, bird or human cases of H5N1 in New Zealand and the overall risk to human health remains low. The H5N1 strain is currently affecting most countries and regions of the world. MPI considers it is highly possible that the virus will arrive in NZ via migratory birds. Australia, New Zealand and most Pacific nations are currently believed to be H5N1 free.

Infection in humans is uncommon and generally occurs after prolonged, unprotected exposure to infected animals (e.g. poultry, wild birds, dairy cattle) in areas experiencing an avian influenza outbreak.

If a human case of H5N1 is detected in New Zealand, health agencies are well placed to provide support to anyone affected. This includes rapid testing of anyone exposed with

symptoms, access to antiviral medications where needed, vaccinations to those at high risk of exposure to the virus, and other wrap-around support.

Please also refer to these links for further information around pandemic planning:

The National Health Emergency Plan:

- [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/emergency-management/national-health-emergency-plan](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/emergency-management/national-health-emergency-plan)

Getting through together: Ethical Values for a Pandemic:

- [neac.health.govt.nz/publications-and-resources/neac-publications/getting-through-together-ethical-values-for-a-pandemic](http://neac.health.govt.nz/publications-and-resources/neac-publications/getting-through-together-ethical-values-for-a-pandemic)

The H5N1 Pre-Pandemic Vaccine Usage Policy:

- [www.health.govt.nz/publication/national-health-emergency-plan-h5n1-pre-pandemic-vaccine-usage-policy](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/national-health-emergency-plan-h5n1-pre-pandemic-vaccine-usage-policy)

The Aotearoa New Zealand Strategic Framework for Managing COVID-19:

- [www.health.govt.nz/publication/aotearoa-new-zealand-strategic-framework-managing-covid-19](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/aotearoa-new-zealand-strategic-framework-managing-covid-19)

& The New Zealand Aotearoa Pandemic Response Policy for Aged Residential Care:

- [www.health.govt.nz/publication/new-zealand-aotearoa-pandemic-response-policy-aged-residential-care](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/new-zealand-aotearoa-pandemic-response-policy-aged-residential-care)

I trust this information fulfils your request. If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us, including this decision, please feel free to contact the OIA Services Team on: [oiagr@health.govt.nz](mailto:oiagr@health.govt.nz).

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz) or by calling 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



Dr Harriette Carr  
**Acting Director of Public Health**  
**Public Health Agency | Te Pou Hauora Tūmatanui**