

AFA Member Advisory on H5N1 (“bird flu”)

March 7, 2025

This highly infectious disease continues to spread in the domestic food animal population, in particular among chickens and cattle. Yes, it is lethal to ferrets. There is no cure, and no vaccine yet. It spreads by direct exposure to infected animals, and via unpasteurized dairy products and raw meat from infected animals. Since it can also be transmitted by infected wildlife and in the environment and carcasses of the infected, we feel it is prudent at this time to limit risk to your pets by reducing outdoor exposure (especially waterfowl).

Also: Those feeding a diet that includes raw meat (both mammal and avian) and freeze-dried raw/dehydrated (FDR) raw products should be aware that this may be becoming increasingly risky: just freezing the meat, or freeze-drying, or dehydrating it does *not* kill the virus. Pet cats in multiple states have died from H5N1, and in at least two cases, a commercial raw or FDR food was found to have been the source. Some of the national manufacturers have responded to inquiries with assurances that 1) they used trusted suppliers only for meat sourcing and 2) They are confident that their manufacturing processes, in particular High Pressure Pasteurization (HPP) would deactivate the H5N1 virus.

What is important to know though, is that while various types of HPP have been studied for effectiveness against bacteria and **some** viruses, *there is no published research at this time proving the effectiveness of HPP against H5N1*. The manufacturers cited the demonstrated efficacy of HPP against other pathogens (one even offered a list of published papers as reference, so bonus points for transparency). While at times in scientific study it may be acceptable, even economical, to use similar research to draw conclusions (known as Generalizing), this may or may not be an appropriate situation to do so. *We just don't know at this point*. It's also important to note that current disruptions to the public health infrastructure have affected the timely collection, reporting and dissemination of critical information regarding the spread and mutation of H5N1.

Given the uncertainties, we urge you to consider your feeding options, and the risks.

For Further Reading:

<https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/index.html>

<https://www.vet.cornell.edu/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-bird-flu-resource-center>

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-health/avian-influenza/avian-influenza-companion-animals>

<https://www.whole-dog-journal.com/blog/how-bird-flu-could-threaten-your-dog/>