

H5 avian influenza update for the Wildlife Rehabilitation Sector

The following questions and answers have been prepared to complement the webinar held 25 June 2025 to provide the Wildlife Rehabilitation sector with an update on H5 avian influenza (or H5 bird flu) preparedness and response. Presentations were delivered by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), Department of Health and Wildlife Health Australia.

Questions and Answers

Q1. Is the Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) Hotline a 24/7 service?

Yes, the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline (also known as 'the EAD Hotline') - 1800 675 888 - is a national 24/7 toll-free telephone service that connects callers to the relevant state or territory animal health authority to report concerns about potential emergency animal diseases (EADs). This is not a resource for general animal health advice or concerns.

Anyone can call the EAD Hotline, and calls are automatically diverted to a phone number registered for each state.

The EAD Hotline should be called when the following criteria are fulfilled.

How to report signs of avian influenza in Western Australia

What to report	Who to call
• More than 5 sick or dead wild birds • Unusual disease signs or mass deaths in wildlife, including marine mammals • More than 5 backyard poultry deaths • Commercial poultry  signs consistent with avian influenza, particularly: ◦ layers with respiratory or nervous signs, a drop in egg production, shell deformities or unexpected mortalities. ◦ broilers with increased mortalities, unusual respiratory signs or nervous signs	Emergency Animal Disease hotline: 1800 675 888 (select WA option)
• Fewer than 5 sick or dead wild birds • Sick, orphaned or injured wildlife	Wildcare Helpline: 9474 9055

Q1. Is the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline a 24/7 service? (continued)

Your call will be answered by knowledgeable, expert biosecurity staff who will respond to your report. They will advise you on what action you need to take.

They may ask you for more information about the detection, such as:

- Your name and contact details
- location of animals (address point, GPS, etc.)
- clinical signs – what clinical signs including sudden death do the animals have?
- number of animals affected.
- any history of the animals e.g. if in captivity

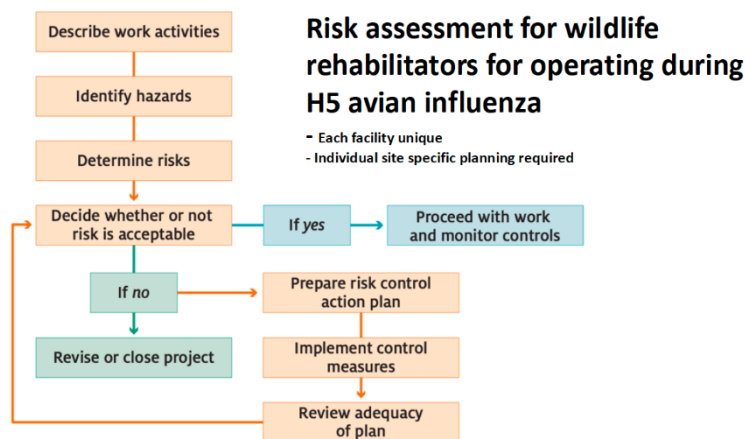
Q2. What will be the role of Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres?

Noting the six major wildlife centres in Western Australia collectively admit over 20,000 birds annually, in the event of a H5 avian influenza outbreak, this number could increase dramatically. Wildlife Rehabilitation centres are currently assessing whether to remain open during a H5 bird flu outbreak, given that the recommended response is to euthanise infected birds. Wildlife centres are currently not equipped, nor do they wish to function primarily as euthanasia facilities.

A Western Australia H5 avian influenza State Response Plan continues to be developed which will assist in defining the role of wildlife rehabilitators in a H5 bird flu response. The concerns of wildlife rehabilitators regarding euthanasia and the significant psychosocial impacts are acknowledged by DBCA.

A survey of licensed wildlife rehabilitators and centres has been prepared to help the department to understand which individuals and groups may 'opt out' of responding to H5 bird flu. This information will assist us to better understand and prepare for what will be required.

Based on experiences overseas and given the severity of clinical signs in common species, treatment is not recommended. Euthanasia may however be undertaken from an animal welfare perspective to relieve animal suffering. Further reading: [Wildlife Health Australia fact sheet- Avian influenza in wildlife birds of Australia](#)



Wildlife Health Australia (2018) National Wildlife Biosecurity Guidelines
https://wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/Portals/0/ResourceCentre/BiosecurityMgmt/National_Wildlife_Biosecurity_Guidelines.pdf

Q3. What if all wildlife rehabilitation facilities and groups choose not to respond to a H5 bird flu outbreak?

The wildlife rehabilitation sector plays a critical role in caring for and rehabilitating wildlife in Western Australia. If the results of the DBCA wildlife rehabilitation sector survey show that the sector will 'opt-out' of a H5 avian influenza response, a co-ordinated response plan will be developed to address the needs of wildlife response from a threatened species and animal welfare perspective.

Q4. How should wildlife rehabilitation groups respond to public enquiries about sick birds in backyards?

Usual triage processes are recommended with an awareness of H5 avian influenza reporting as below.

Australia currently remains free of H5 bird flu. We are currently in the preparedness phase (pre-incursion) therefore advice and reporting is as below:

Avoid – Sick and dead birds can carry diseases, including avian influenza which can affect humans. It is recommended to avoid direct contact with birds that are sick or have died unexpectedly unless you use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Noting the risk of leaving the birds/animals in place outweighs the risk of spreading infection by moving them.

See the Department of Health website for PPE recommendations for those in contact and who work with wildlife: [avian-influenza-in-humans-cdna-national-guidelines-for-public-health-units](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/avian-influenza-in-humans-cdna-national-guidelines-for-public-health-units)

Record – If you see sick or dead wild birds or wildlife, note the number of dead birds or animals, and the species, location, date and time.

Report – Reporting signs of avian influenza is important to enable early detection and to monitor the level and locations of H5 avian influenza if it arrives in Australia. Under the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007*, any strain of avian influenza is a reportable disease and anyone who suspects the disease is present must report it.

The reporting criteria regarding how to report signs of avian influenza in Western Australia as above in Q1 should be followed.

Carcass disposal

- On private properties, subject to council local laws, owners will be able to dispose of dead birds by placing them in double plastic bags in their red general wastebin.
- Care should be taken to wear disposable gloves, long sleeved clothing, a surgical mask, eye protection and to wash hands thoroughly after handling the dead bird.
- Alternatively, the dead bird can also be buried to a depth of 60cm (not in plastic).

If an incursion (disease is confirmed) in WA, it is likely further general information call centres will be deployed with additional specific information similar to that during the COVID response.

Q5. Will DBCA Personal Protective Equipment grab boxes be housed in remote regional areas?

Yes, grab boxes will be distributed to regional DBCA office locations including Kununurra, Broome, Karratha, Exmouth, Goldfields, Swan Coastal, Bunbury and Albany and will be deployed, as required. DBCA staff and trained volunteers should not conduct surveillance or response activities unless they have been appropriately trained and have appropriate PPE.

Q6. When will the WildTalk service resume?

The WildTalk service resumed on 1 July 2025 <https://wildtalk.org.au/>.

This service is designed to provide a network of counselling professionals available 24/7 free of charge, and includes an assistance program to all rescuers, carers, veterinary professionals and researchers through times of illness, injury, or crisis that have an impact on mental health.

Established in 2019, WildTalk recognises a need to support the wildlife rescue and rehabilitation workers in unique ways. The service is provided independently of any wildlife organisation, giving clients the confidence to be open and candid.



If you need support, we are here for you.

WildTalk - 1300 945 382

Lifeline - 13 11 14

Email - info@wildtalk.org.au

Q7. Will there be regional sites to take birds for euthanasia and contaminated PPE? Especially, if Wildlife centres choose to close?

This is something which will be addressed in the State Response Plan which is currently in development by DPIRD as the Western Australian State Hazard Management Authority (HMA) for animal and plant biosecurity.

Given the high fatality rate of wildlife infected with H5 avian influenza, the most humane response in most cases will be euthanasia. In situations where sick wildlife is found together with wildlife carcasses, a risk assessment for living wildlife and carcass management should consider the following potential risks/benefits of undertaking management actions:

- Risks to human health if sick wildlife is left in situ.
- Risks to human health and/or safety if the decision is made to remove and/or euthanise sick wildlife.
- Risks to healthy wildlife populations via human disturbance if removing and/or euthanising sick wildlife.
- Benefits to healthy wildlife populations, animal welfare and human health, safety or social amenity if sick wildlife is removed and/or euthanised.

Actions will be determined on a case-by-case basis and may include:

- No intervention.
- Restricting access to a site, area or location.
- Euthanasia.

Q7. Will there be regional sites to take birds for euthanasia and contaminated PPE? Especially, if Wildlife centres choose to close? (continued)

Members of the public may attempt to refer sick wildlife to wildlife rehabilitators or vets for supportive care. Wildlife infected with H5 avian influenza may continue to shed the virus. Transporting them and bringing them to alternative facilities could pose a risk to people and other animals.

Decision makers may decide to approve supportive care of specific individuals of an important species, for example species of conservation concern under relevant state/territory/Commonwealth legislation or of ecotourism value. However, there are very limited supportive care options available, and decisions on whether to attempt care should consider whether adequate facilities exist, among other factors.

Q8. Is expired PPE safe to use?

Expired PPE can be used for training purposes only. This may be useful pre-incursion as part of preparedness training. Ongoing discussions are underway regarding PPE provisioning as part of the State Response Plan. DBCA is also preparing 'grab boxes' to be used in surveillance and response for frontline DBCA staff and appropriately trained volunteers.

Q9. Are volunteers (registered with DBCA) covered for illness only injury?

Volunteers undertaking work on behalf of DBCA would be covered under personal Accident Cover, however it should be noted that Personal Accident insurance only covers injuries resulting from an accident. It does not cover illness, sickness or disease (including H5 avian influenza).

Noting that illness occurring as a direct consequence of an injury caused by an accident may be covered - for example, a volunteer contracts tetanus after being injured accidentally by a rusty nail. However, if participating in response and employed in this process by the lead HMA insurance details would need to be confirmed.

Q10. When will the State Response Plan for H5 avian influenza be available?

Initial meetings have been held between DPIRD, DBCA, WALGA (WA Local Government Association) and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation regarding the State Response Plan and further drafts of the plan are expected in late October 2025.

Q11. Will wildlife rehabilitation stakeholders be consulted in developing the response plan?

DBCA is preparing a survey for licensed wildlife rehabilitators and centres to understand which individuals and groups may 'opt in' or 'opt out' of a response. This will help us to better understand and prepare for what will be required. Further discussions and updates will also be provided to the WA Wildlife Rehabilitation Reference Group by the DBCA Wildlife Response Co-ordinator.

Q12. Will there be any testing facilities in regional areas or will samples need to be transported to Perth?

At this stage the diagnostic testing facility is only available in Perth through the DPIRD Diagnostics and Laboratory Services (DDLS) situated in Kensington.

When samples are submitted to DDLS for H5 avian influenza testing, DDLS can generally report an answer the next day if the tests are negative. However, if any results are indeterminate or positive, the samples will be sent to the Australian Centre for Disease preparedness (ACDP) in Geelong, Victoria for testing, and will be tested the next day. In this situation, DDLS normally has preliminary results two to three days after arrival at DDLS. Delays have occurred with courier companies and for urgent samples from remote locations they should be sent **same day** for air transport.

Q13. Where can I find more information on H5 bird flu?

Further information is available on the following websites:

- [Avian influenza](#)
- [National Wildlife Biosecurity Guidelines one page info sheet.pdf](#)
- [H5 avian influenza \(bird flu\) | Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions](#)
- [Avian influenza \(bird flu\)](#)
- [Avian influenza in humans – CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units | Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing](#)
- [H5 bird flu](#)
- [Wild Bird Surveillance](#)
- [Resources for H5 avian influenza \(bird flu\) preparedness - DAFF](#)