

Bird flu virus remains infectious up to 600 days in municipal landfills

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Poultry carcasses infected with bird flu can remain infectious in municipal landfills for almost two years, scientists report. Credit: People's Republic of China

Amid concerns about a pandemic of swine flu, researchers from Nebraska report for the first time that poultry carcasses infected with another threat — the 'bird flu' virus — can remain infectious in municipal landfills for almost 2 years. Their report is scheduled for the June 15 issue of ACS' semi-monthly journal *Environmental Science & Technology*.

Shannon L. Bartelt-Hunt and colleagues note that avian influenza, specifically the H5N1 strain, is an ongoing public health concern. Hundreds of millions of chickens and ducks infected with the [virus](#) have

died or been culled from flocks worldwide in efforts to control the disease. More than 4 million poultry died or were culled in a 2002 outbreak in Virginia, and the carcasses were disposed of in municipal landfills. Until now, few studies have directly assessed the safety of landfill disposal.

“The objectives of this study were to assess the survival of avian influenza in landfill leachate and the influence of environmental factors,” says the report. The data showed that the virus survived in landfill leachate — liquid that drains or “leaches” from a landfill — for at least 30 days and up to 600 days. The two factors that most reduced influenza survival times were elevated temperature and acidic or alkaline pH.

“Data obtained from this study indicate that landfilling is an appropriate method for disposal of carcasses infected with avian influenza,” says the study, noting that landfills are designed to hold material for much longer periods of time.

More information: *Environmental Science & Technology*, Journal Article: “Survival of the [Avian Influenza](#) Virus (H6N2) After Land Disposal”

Source: American Chemical Society ([news](#) : [web](#))

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