

# Despite worries, experts say bird flu unlikely to effect humans

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Bird flu has been making headlines over the past month, resulting in millions of bird deaths, driving up poultry and egg prices, and raising public concern over potential human infections. According to the

experts, however, bird flu is unlikely to become the next human pandemic. In its current variations, it simply lacks the ability to spread among people the same way that COVID-19 did.

According to the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the H5N1 [bird flu](#) has been reported in 6,922 [wild birds](#), 58,789,591 poultry and a single human within the U.S.

While scientists are keeping a close eye on animal influenza variations for any mutations that may make the [viruses](#) more dangerous to humans, there is no [scientific consensus](#) to support the claim that H5N1 bird flu could become a pandemic. According to two California-based experts, bird flu is unlikely to spread to humans in its current state.

"Bird flu is fairly unlikely to be the next pandemic," Natasha Spottiswoode, MD, Ph.D., told the University of California San Francisco. "To become a pandemic, a [virus](#) has to be able to pass from person to person effectively—as COVID-19 does. This virus has not shown the propensity to do that yet."

UCSF biochemist Joe DeRisi agreed.

"There have been thousands of outbreaks in birds and dozens in other animals, and the virus hasn't spilled over into humans," DeRisi told the university. "That gives us some confidence that the biological barrier that the virus would have to cross between birds and us is high. That doesn't mean it can't be surpassed—we know it can—but it isn't likely. There's reason not to panic, but there's also reason to be cautious."

That being said, scientists are concerned about other viruses being carried by birds. According to one CDC expert, the sheer number of viruses carried by birds is a concern in general. It's not just H5N1 bird flu that has scientists concerned.

"The current situation, with so much virus in birds, is concerning," Sonja Olsen, associate director for preparedness and response in the CDC's influenza division, told Bloomberg. "Influenza viruses like to share their genetic material. They are constantly evolving, and that's why surveillance in animals and humans is so important.

"It's difficult to predict which virus is going to acquire mutations that will be more adaptive to humans. That's why we do what we do, the surveillance and rapid response, jumping on every case."

A Fudan University and University of Sydney partnership project recently published in One Health offered insight into the trends of many animal [influenza viruses](#) over the past decades.

"The issue is whether a mutation within a subtype is going to be the one that suddenly gives a certain [influenza virus](#) the power to transmit person to person," Professor Ward, a co-author of the project, explained. "The first barrier is getting into mammals. It's a big jump for a virus to go from birds into mammals, and then if it's transmitting quite well there's a greater chance it will jump into humans.

"It's just a numbers game. Viruses jumping species is not a rare event, so it's likely a virus will eventually make that final jump to humans."

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