



Mott Poll Report

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Parents Unsure about Bird Flu

Avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, has garnered attention recently due to increased numbers of infections found at poultry farms, as well as spreading to other farm animals and to the humans who work with infected animals. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 1-18 years old about their knowledge and concerns regarding bird flu.

Parents' main information sources about bird flu are news reports (78%), social media (31%), internet searches (19%), family or friends (15%), government agency (11%), and healthcare providers (11%). Two-thirds (68%) don't know if there have been cases of bird flu in their state, and 45% have heard little or nothing about it. One-third of parents (34%) have taken at least one action to protect their family against getting bird flu, such as being more careful about general hygiene (22%) and about handling eggs, chicken, and beef (13%), avoiding contact with birds and other wild animals (12%), avoiding raw milk (10%), and eating less eggs, chicken, and beef (7%). The 68% of parents who report no actions to protect against bird flu say that they already have good hygiene practices (31%), don't know what actions are recommended (29%), or do not feel at risk (14%).

Only 43% of parents feel they are able to find accurate and current information about bird flu, while 20% say the media is making too big a deal about it. About half of parents (47%) rate themselves as *very concerned* about the increased cost of eggs and meat associated with bird flu, and over one-quarter are *very concerned* about bird flu spreading from animals to humans (28%) or humans to humans (31%). Fewer are *very concerned* about the risk of bird flu spreading through food products (16%) or risk to pets that go outdoors (8%).

Forty-one percent of parents wish the government was doing more to prevent a bird flu outbreak. Only 18% of parents are *very confident* that the government has the ability to remove infected animals/animal products from the food supply, while 25% are *not confident*. Regarding the government's ability to inform people about which products should be recalled/thrown away, 22% are *very confident* and 23% *not confident*. Finally, only 12% of parents are *very confident* the government can prevent the spread of bird flu to humans, while 34% are *not confident*.

Parent confidence in state/federal government's ability to handle bird flu

Very confident Somewhat confident Not confident

Removing infected animals/animal products from food supply

18% 57% 25%

Informing people which products should be recalled/thrown out

22% 55% 23%

Preventing spread to humans

12% 54% 34%

Report Highlights

Less than half of parents feel they are able to find accurate information about bird flu.

1 in 3 parents have taken action to protect their family against bird flu.

2 in 5 parents wish the government was doing more to prevent a bird flu outbreak.

1 in 5 parents say the media is making too big a deal about bird flu.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in February 2025 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 1-18 years living in their household (n=2,021). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 67% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±1 to 3 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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Implications

H5N1 is a type of influenza A virus that mainly infects wild birds, including songbirds, birds of prey, and waterfowl such as ducks and geese. These wild birds transmit infection to farm poultry, with subsequent transmission to other farm animals (cows, pigs) and animals that eat wild birds, including pets. The version currently circulating in the US is known as H5N1 2.3.4.4b and is highly lethal. There is no treatment or cure; the virus produces a gastrointestinal infection, causing death from diarrhea and respiratory distress. This Mott Poll Report highlights the challenge parents face in keeping track of an emerging situation and understanding its potential threat to their child's health.

H5N1 is very contagious. Once it has been found in a farm animal, it has become standard practice to cull the entire flock or herd to prevent the spread. Millions of chickens have been culled as a preventive measure, contributing to the increased price of eggs. Thus far, H5N1 infections in humans have been limited to those who come in close contact with infected animals; most often this involves farmworkers but recently included an individual whose backyard flock of chickens was infected. At the time of this report, there has been no evidence of transmission from human to human; however, previous outbreaks of H5N1, including one in 2003-2005, highlight this possibility.

The risks of bird flu are greatest for individuals who work with farm animals and their families, but the situation presents an opportunity for parents to reinforce the principles of good hygiene with their children. Certainly, children should be cautioned to avoid dead animals. More difficult is avoiding animal droppings, which can be hard to detect in yards or sandboxes. As a general rule, parents should teach their children to keep their hands away from their face (e.g., avoid rubbing eyes or touching their mouth). Additionally, parents should make sure children wash their hands with soap and water after touching birds and other animals at a petting zoo or a neighbor's backyard chicken coop.

Some parents in this Mott Poll indicated they have cut back on eating poultry products like eggs and chicken. However, as long as eggs and meat are fully cooked, there is no evidence that bird flu is spread through these products. Parents should make sure that milk and dairy products are pasteurized, which means heated to kill germs.

A bird flu-related risk that may go unrecognized is the anxiety that it will turn into another pandemic. Given the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's health, it is very reasonable that many parents would like the government to do more about preventing bird flu from spreading to humans. However, one-third of parents in this Mott Poll were not confident in the government's ability to contain bird flu. Despite their own concerns, parents may want to be mindful about conversations around bird flu, to avoid causing unnecessary anxiety in children who may not understand the risks.

Although some parents expressed the belief that the media is overselling the danger of bird flu, most parents indicated they are relying on local or national news reports to keep abreast of the situation. It is likely that parents will continue to view the news as a trusted source, particularly because many lack confidence in being able to find accurate, up-to-date information on their own.