

Deadly bird flu is 'dangerously close' to being next pandemic and it's 'time to be prepared', warn experts...

BIRD flu is "dangerously close" to triggering the next human pandemic, experts have warned. Scientists raised concerns after a person in the US caught

By Isabel Shaw

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BIRD flu is "dangerously close" to triggering the next human pandemic, experts have warned.

Scientists raised concerns after a person in the US caught the disease from a cow, suggesting the highly pathogenic [H5N1](#) is becoming better at spreading.



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An individual in Texas has caught bird flu from a cow
Credit: EPA

The new case, discovered in Texas, spurred an emergency briefing attended by bird flu researchers, doctors and officials from government agencies.

Dr Suresh Kuchipudi, a bird flu researcher in Pittsburgh, warned: "This virus [has been] on the top of the pandemic list for many, many years and probably decades.

"And now we are getting dangerously close to this virus potentially causing a pandemic," [MailOnline](#) reports.

"It is really high time that we are prepared."

UK expert Prof James Wood, from the University of Cambridge and Co-Director of Cambridge Infectious Diseases, suggested, however, that this case by itself is not a cause for concern.

"The finding of a single human case in the US does not indicate that the virus is about to become a human pandemic," he told the Sun.

He added: "There has been a huge degree of human exposure with this clade of viruses over the last three years and what is remarkable is that so few human cases have been detected."

It comes as [thousands of dead penguins](#) have been discovered in Antarctica, thought to have been killed by the bird flu.

In recent years, H5N1 has killed millions of wild birds and poultry across the world.

It has also started to jump to other animals, including cats, bears, foxes, mink, sea lions and even humans.

Springwatch tackles the impact of avian flu which has caused mass animal deaths in darkest episode yet

Cows were added to that ever-growing list last week when the US reported H5N1 infections in dairy herds.

Since then, cases have been confirmed or are under investigation in five states - Texas, Kansas, Michigan, New Mexico and Idaho.

To become a pandemic, a virus needs to be able to infect humans or animals easily and spread between them.

So far, there is no evidence that bird flu can be transmitted between people.

However, experts fear the sheer scale of the current spread could give the virus [more opportunities to evolve](#), enabling H5N1 to [better spread between mammals - and potentially humans](#).



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'100 times worse than Covid'

Research shows the death rate in humans who catch bird flu can be as high as 60 per cent.

John Fulton, a pharmaceutical industry consultant, said: "This appears to be 100 times worse than Covid, or it could be if it mutates and maintains its high case fatality rate.

"Once it's mutated to infect humans, we can only hope that the [fatality rate] drops."

At least 887 people have been infected with bird flu in the past 20 years - and 462 of these died.

For comparison, Covid currently kills less than 0.1 per cent of the people it infects, although at the beginning of the pandemic, this was around 20 per cent.

There is no human bird flu jab on the market, but the UK government is said to be drawing up plans to [stockpile](#) regular flu vaccine in case of a pandemic.

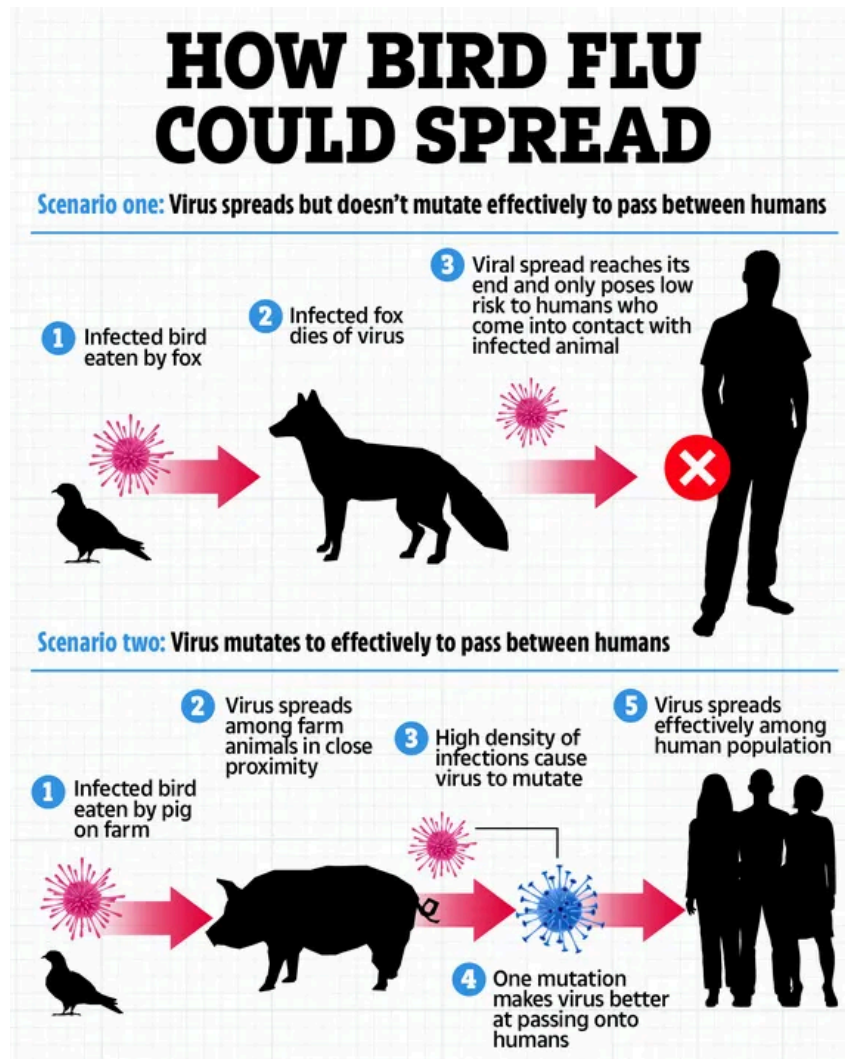
It would be the first time it has been done for the disease, regarded as a [top threat for the next global health emergency](#).

There have been five [confirmed cases of bird flu](#) in the UK since 2022.

The risk appears higher in the Far East, with two [deaths in Cambodia](#) and at least one "cluster" of cases that raised fears of human-to-human transmission.

In government guidance issued last month, Brits were advised to stay at least two meters away from wild birds because of bird flu fears.

People should avoid all contact with wild birds, which includes pigeons, swans, and seagulls, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) officials said.



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The symptoms of bird flu

THE main symptoms of bird flu can appear very quickly.

- A very high temperature or feeling hot or shivery

- Aching muscles
- Headache
- A cough or shortness of breath

Other early symptoms may include:

- Diarrhoea
- Sickness
- Stomach pain
- Chest pain
- Bleeding from the nose and gums
- Conjunctivitis