

PRESS RELEASE

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Agencies look to the public to help detect diseases “Got Dead Bird?”

The Hawaii Department of Health and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are asking the public’s help in the early detection of two diseases – West Nile Virus and bird flu (avian influenza) - that are not yet present in Hawaii, but could arrive. West Nile Virus and bird flu are two diseases that agencies are monitoring for, but the public’s help is needed in order to watch for these diseases across the state.

The recent report of more than 20 sick chickens on Kauai has highlighted the need to educate people about reporting sick or dead birds by calling 211 so that they can be tested for West Nile Virus and bird flu. These diseases could show up in wild or pet birds or poultry, if the diseases arrive in Hawaii. Neither disease is suspected as the cause of death in the Kauai chickens.

Since both diseases can sicken and kill birds, Hawaii’s birds can serve as a “sentinel” for either disease. Finding a dead bird could mean that West Nile Virus or bird flu is present. Anyone finding a dead bird that is fairly fresh (not decomposed), and not flattened (flat birds that have been run over by vehicles are not testable) is asked to call 211 to report it for testing.

The toll-free 211 number may be dialed direct from any island and most cell phones, and it is answered by Aloha United Way operators. The operators will make sure the bird is appropriate for testing, and will send trained agency staff to pick up the bird and deliver it to the Hawaii Department of Health State Laboratory for disease testing.

A new website is also available for online reporting of dead birds, and for more information on the project, www.gotdeadbird.org.



West Nile Virus spreads to people, birds and other animals when mosquitoes bite infected birds. West Nile Virus was introduced to New York in 1999, and has spread across the U.S., Canada and Mexico with migrating birds. To date, Alaska and Hawaii are the two states that do not have the virus, and Hawaii officials are working to prevent the disease from arriving here. Since 1999, West Nile Virus has sickened more than 24,000 people

and killed 967 people in the U.S. The virus has also caused some populations of birds such as crows to decline as much as 45%. Should the West Nile Virus were to arrive and become established in Hawaii, human illnesses can be expected and possibly some deaths, along with the possible extinction of many of our remaining native birds.

Bird flu is a virus that usually affects birds and can be passed from bird-to-bird, much like our human flu virus is passed from person to person. Bird flu is highly contagious between birds, and has caused millions of deaths in wild and domestic birds in areas where the virus has spread. So far, areas where the virus has been found include Asia, parts of Europe, Africa, and the Near East. Although it is rare for people to catch bird flu, there have been roughly 200 cases to date, most cases were caused when people came into direct contact with excretions or fluids of infected birds, or contaminated surfaces.

Although these are two separate and different diseases, the role that the public is asked to play is the same: Report dead birds to 211 or www.gotdeadbird.org.

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Christy Martin is the Public Information Officer for the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS), a public/private partnership working to protect Hawaii from invasive species.