



H5 BIRD FLU INFORMATION FOR MARAE

PREPARED SPECIFICALLY FOR TE WHAKAKITENGA O WAIKATO MARAE
Know the source. Know the story. Protect your whaanau.

If you cannot confidently explain where a bird came from, why it died, or how it has been handled, do not touch it, prepare it, receive it for kai, or eat it.

This booklet complements the Marae H5 Bird Flu Toolbox. It provides short, practical information for whaanau. It is not a response manual and does not replace current advice from MPI, Health New Zealand, Taumata Arowai, DOC, veterinarians or food-safety authorities.

What Is H5 Bird Flu and Why Does It Matter to Our Marae?

Birds are part of everyday life for Te Whakakitenga o Waikato marae. We see them while fishing, hunting, planting, restoring wetlands, gathering kai, caring for our buildings and spending time across rural, coastal and urban environments. They are part of the taiao that has sustained our people for generations (Waikato-Tainui, 2020).

H5 bird flu, also called highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1, is a disease that mainly affects birds. Overseas it has caused illness and death in wild birds and poultry and has occasionally infected mammals. Human infections remain uncommon and have usually followed close, unprotected contact with infected animals or heavily contaminated places (Health New Zealand, 2026a; Ministry for Primary Industries [MPI], 2026a; World Health Organization [WHO], 2024).

This information booklet has been written because marae life brings people, food, water, pets and the taiao together. Our whaanau may harvest kai, receive birds from hunters, prepare food for tangihanga and Poukai, collect rainwater, care for backyard poultry, restore wetlands and work around places where birds naturally gather. Understanding where extra care may be needed helps us continue those activities confidently.

H5 bird flu is not a reason to fear birds or withdraw from the taiao. It is a reason to stay informed, recognise when something is unusual and use reliable advice when decisions need to be made (MPI, 2026a, 2026k).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Think about how your marae interacts with birds, food, pets, rainwater and the wider taiao. Which activities may bring whaanau into close contact with sick or dead birds?

REMEMBER THIS

H5 bird flu is a disease to understand, not a reason to fear the taiao.

Key sources:

Health New Zealand (2026a); MPI (2026a, 2026k); Waikato-Tainui (2020); WHO (2024).

How Could Bird Flu Reach Our Marae?

Birds move across wetlands, rivers, harbours, coastlines, farms, parks, towns and cities without recognising property or rohe boundaries. Their presence around a marae is normal and does not mean H5 bird flu is present (MPI, 2026a; Waikato-Tainui, 2020).

The greater concern is close contact with a sick or dead bird, its blood, saliva, droppings or feathers, or with a place heavily contaminated by infected birds. Contact may occur while hunting, gathering kai, working around roofs and gutters, restoring wetlands, cleaning equipment, caring for poultry or dealing with a bird brought home by a dog or cat (Health New Zealand, 2026c; MPI, 2026c, 2026e).

Bird flu could also be carried from one place to another on muddy footwear, clothing, nets, crates, tools, vehicles or pet gear. This does not mean every outdoor activity is dangerous. It means that visible mud, droppings and bird material should not be carried unnecessarily into the wharekai, home, vehicle, poultry area or another environmental site.

Every marae will have different points of contact. Understanding those ordinary connections helps whaanau decide where simple precautions, cleaning or further advice may be useful.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Where do birds gather near your marae? How could people, equipment, pets, food or water carry material from those places into areas used by whaanau?

REMEMBER THIS

Birds belong in our environment. Pay attention to close contact with sick or dead birds and to where contaminated material could travel next.

Key sources:

Health New Zealand (2026c); MPI (2026a, 2026c, 2026e); Waikato-Tainui (2020).

What Should We Look Out For?

Our whaanau often know their local environment well. Hunters know where birds usually gather, fishers notice changes around waterways and harbours, and restoration teams recognise what is normal at the places they care for. That knowledge helps identify when something does not look right (Waikato-Tainui, 2020).

One sick or dead bird does not prove H5 bird flu. Birds can be affected by injury, storms, starvation, pollution, botulism and many other diseases. Greater concern arises when several birds become sick or die in the same place, different species are affected, or mortality continues over a short period (Department of Conservation, 2026; MPI, 2026b).

Unusual behaviour may include birds that cannot stand or fly, walk in circles, lose balance, hold their necks strangely, have drooping wings, struggle to breathe or show little fear of people. These signs do not diagnose H5 bird flu, but they show that a bird is unwell and should not be handled unnecessarily (MPI, 2026b; World Organisation for Animal Health [WOAH], 2024).

You do not need to identify the disease. Notice the pattern, keep your distance and share unusual observations through the correct reporting channel.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

What birds and behaviours are normal near your marae? Who would be most likely to notice an unusual cluster of sick or dead birds?

REMEMBER THIS

Know what is normal. Notice the pattern. You do not need to diagnose the cause.

Key sources:

Department of Conservation (2026); MPI (2026b); Waikato-Tainui (2020); WOAH (2024).

I Found a Sick or Dead Bird - What Should I Do?

Finding a sick or dead bird can create a strong urge to help, remove it or take it somewhere safer. Those intentions come from care, but the safest first step is to stop and observe from a distance.

Look around before acting. Is it one bird or are several affected? Are other birds behaving unusually? Can tamariki, visitors, dogs or cats reach the bird? Record the location and number of birds and, where useful, take a photograph without moving closer (MPI, 2026b, 2026c).

Do not pick up, move, bury, burn or take home a sick or dead wild bird unless an authorised person has advised you to do so. Moving it may expose people and pets and may carry material into a vehicle, home, wharekai or another part of the taiao. MPI currently asks people to report groups of three or more sick or dead wild birds through its exotic pest and disease reporting service (MPI, 2026b).

Although our first instinct may be to help, preventing unnecessary exposure is also an act of manaakitanga. Protecting our own health allows us to continue caring for our whaanau and the taiao.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Would people at your marae know how to keep others and pets away, record the location and report an unusual group of sick or dead birds?

REMEMBER THIS

Observe first. Do not touch or move the bird.
Record and report unusual clusters.

Key sources:

MPI (2026b, 2026c, 2026k).

Spending Time in the Taiao

Waikato-Tainui whaanau spend time across rivers, harbours, the ocean, wetlands, forests, farms, parks and urban spaces. We fish, gather kai, check hīnaki, boat, plant, monitor, trap pests, walk dogs and teach tamariki. Birds are a normal part of these environments and their presence alone does not create a high risk to people (Health New Zealand, 2026a; Waikato-Tainui, 2020).

The greater concern is close, unprotected contact with a sick or dead bird or a place heavily contaminated by infected birds. Seeing gulls while fishing, ducks while checking hīnaki or birds during a planting day is not, by itself, a reason to stop the activity (WHO, 2024).

The situation changes when several birds are dead together, birds appear unable to stand or fly, or droppings and body material are concentrated where people are working. In that immediate area, pause, keep people and pets back and consider whether the activity should move elsewhere while advice is sought (MPI, 2026c).

Continue living your relationship with the taiao. Start clean, cover cuts, wash hands before eating and avoid carrying visible mud, droppings or feathers from one site to another.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

What do you normally see where your whaanau fish, gather, restore or recreate?
What would make you pause and look more carefully?

REMEMBER THIS

Being among healthy birds is normal. The concern is close contact with sick or dead birds or heavily contaminated places.

Key sources:

Health New Zealand (2026a); MPI (2026c); Waikato-Tainui (2020); WHO (2024).

We Are Harvesting Kai for a Tangihanga or Poukai

Gathering and contributing kai for a tangihanga or Poukai is an expression of manaakitanga and the mana of a marae. Particular marae are known for particular kai harvested from the wild, and those foods carry relationships with place, knowledge, generosity and identity (Waikato-Tainui, n.d.; Waikato-Tainui, 2020).

H5 bird flu does not mean customary harvesting or gathering kai should stop. Fishing, gathering kaimoana, collecting tuna or watercress and other lawful practices can continue when the environment appears normal. Birds naturally share many of these places with us.

When birds themselves are being harvested, the health and story of the bird matter. Do not harvest a bird that appears sick, behaves abnormally or was found already dead. If several sick or dead birds are present where kai is being gathered, pause and consider another location while current advice is sought (MPI, 2026c, 2026k).

Those preparing food for large gatherings carry the trust of everyone who will eat it. Knowing where the bird came from, what was observed before it was harvested and how it was handled protects that trust without diminishing the cultural importance of the kai.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Before harvested birds are prepared, can the people supplying them confidently explain where they came from, that they appeared healthy, and how they were handled and chilled?

REMEMBER THIS

Manaakitanga includes protecting the people who will eat the kai. Never use a bird that was sick, found dead or cannot be confidently explained.

Key sources:

MPI (2026c, 2026k); Waikato-Tainui (n.d., 2020).

A Hunter Has Offered Our Marae and Whaanau Birds

Hunters often contribute birds because they know the kai will be valued by kaumaatua, whaanau or the marae. The gift can be acknowledged as an expression of generosity while the receiving marae asks the questions needed to protect everyone who may prepare or eat it.

The receiver may not have seen the harvest and should not have to rely on appearance or smell. Ask where and when the birds were harvested, whether they were alive and behaving normally beforehand, whether sick or dead birds were seen nearby, and how quickly the birds were chilled and stored (MPI, 2026c, 2026k).

Do not receive a bird for kai if it was found already dead, its source is unclear, its temperature history is unknown or the person cannot explain why it died. Declining an uncertain bird is not rejecting the hunter. It is a reasonable decision made on behalf of the wider group who will carry the consequences.

Once a bird enters the wharekai, people assume it has been responsibly sourced. A respectful receiving conversation protects the hunter, the ringawera and every person who will share the meal.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Does your marae have a respectful way to ask about the source, condition and handling of birds brought to the door?

REMEMBER THIS

Know the source. Know the story. If the history is uncertain, do not receive the bird for kai.

Key sources:

MPI (2026c, 2026k).

Ringawera - Preparing Birds Safely

Ringawera are among the most experienced food handlers on the marae. This information builds on the care they already take when preparing meals for tangihanga, Poukai, haakari and hui.

Before preparation begins, the source and condition of the bird should already be understood. If concerns emerge at the bench, preparation should pause until the ringawera lead is satisfied that the bird is suitable for food. A bird of uncertain origin should not be made safe by washing, seasoning or cooking.

Whether lawfully harvested or purchased, every uncooked bird should be treated as raw poultry. Wash hands with soap after handling it, keep its juices away from salads, bread and cooked foods, and clean knives, boards, taps and benches before they are used for anything else (MPI, 2025a, 2026d).

Cook poultry thoroughly. Heat is the food-safety control that destroys influenza viruses and common bacteria when food is cooked properly. Do not place cooked poultry back onto a plate or surface that held it raw (MPI, 2026d, 2026f; WHO, 2024).

Safe preparation is not separate from manaakitanga. It is one of the clearest ways ringawera protect the people they welcome and feed.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Does everyone preparing birds know their source, keep raw food separate and understand who should be told when a concern arises?

REMEMBER THIS

Safe kai begins with a known source, clean preparation, separation of raw food and thorough cooking.

Key sources:

MPI (2025a, 2026d, 2026f); WHO (2024).

Raw Chicken, Turkey and Duck from the Supermarket

Bird-flu awareness should not give the impression that supermarket poultry is unsafe. Poultry sold through normal commercial channels remains safe to eat when stored, handled and cooked correctly. New Zealand animal-health and food-safety systems continue to monitor commercial production and provide current advice if circumstances change (MPI, 2026f).

Raw chicken, turkey and duck can carry common food-poisoning bacteria, especially *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella*, even when the product is fresh and comes from an approved retailer. These everyday risks are why raw poultry should be contained, refrigerated promptly and stored below ready-to-eat food so juices cannot drip onto other kai (MPI, 2025a, 2026d).

Use clean equipment, wash hands after handling raw poultry and keep it separate from salads, fruit, bread and cooked food. Follow package storage and cooking instructions and chill leftovers without delay.

The same principles apply in a home kitchen and a wharekai. The number of people being fed may change, but the need to contain raw juices, prevent cross-contamination and cook poultry thoroughly does not.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Where is raw poultry stored at your marae, and could its packaging or juices come into contact with ready-to-eat food?

REMEMBER THIS

Commercial poultry remains safe to eat when it is kept cold, handled hygienically and cooked thoroughly.

Key sources:

MPI (2025a, 2026d, 2026f).

Why You Should Never Wash Raw Chicken

Washing raw chicken, turkey or duck has often been taught as a way of cleaning the bird. Current food-safety advice has changed because research shows that rinsing poultry does not remove the germs that matter and can spread them around the kitchen.

Water splashing from raw poultry can carry invisible droplets onto the sink, taps, benches, clothing, utensils and nearby food. This increases the chance of cross-contamination, particularly when salads, fruit, bread or cooked food are being prepared at the same time (MPI, 2025a, 2026d).

Remove the poultry carefully from its packaging and place it directly into the preparation or cooking container. If liquid needs to be removed, use disposable paper towel and place it straight into the rubbish. Wash hands with soap and clean anything touched by raw juices.

Cooking, not washing, is what makes poultry safe. Thorough cooking destroys influenza viruses and common food-poisoning bacteria. Respecting older practices does not prevent us from changing them when better evidence becomes available (MPI, 2026d, 2026f; WHO, 2024).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Is raw poultry still washed in your wharekai or home kitchen? Does everyone understand that splashing water can spread contamination beyond the sink?

REMEMBER THIS

Do not wash raw poultry. Washing spreads germs; thorough cooking destroys them.

Key sources:

MPI (2025a, 2026d, 2026f); WHO (2024).

Bird Droppings on Our Marae Roof - Is Our Rainwater Safe?

Any marae may collect rainwater to supplement its water supply, support resilience or meet everyday needs. Water used for drinking and preparing kai begins its journey on the roof, so the condition of the roof, gutters and collection system matters (Taumata Arowai, 2025a, 2026).

Birds naturally perch on roofs and leave droppings, feathers and nesting material. Rain can wash that material through gutters and downpipes into storage tanks. This is not only an H5 bird flu issue. Bird droppings can carry microorganisms that affect untreated water quality at any time (Ministry of Health, 2018; Taumata Arowai, 2025a).

Bird droppings on a roof do not automatically mean the tank water is unsafe or that H5 bird flu is present. Risk depends on the condition of the collection system, the amount of contamination and whether the water is properly protected, treated and monitored. First-flush devices, intact screens, sealed tank lids and maintained treatment systems all help reduce contamination.

If H5 bird flu is confirmed nearby and sick or dead birds have been found on or around the collection area, seek current advice before relying on untreated tank water for drinking or preparing food. An alternative potable supply may be appropriate until the concern has been assessed (Health New Zealand, 2026c; MPI, 2026a).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Does your marae know where its drinking water comes from, when the roof and gutters were last checked, and whether treatment and first-flush systems are working?

REMEMBER THIS

Healthy drinking water starts on the roof. Maintain the whole collection and treatment system, not only the tank.

Key sources:

Health New Zealand (2026c); Ministry of Health (2018); MPI (2026a); Taumata Arowai (2025a, 2026).

Cleaning Marae Roofs, Gutters and Water Tanks

Cleaning roofs, gutters and rainwater systems is ordinary marae maintenance, but it should be planned with both water quality and worker safety in mind. Leaves, dust, nesting material and bird droppings can build up over time and should not be allowed to move unchecked into the water supply (Taumata Arowai, 2025a, 2026).

Before cleaning, look for unusual bird activity, several dead birds or heavy fresh contamination. If an H5 event is suspected or confirmed nearby, do not start by sweeping, blowing or water-blasting the area. Seek current advice about the safest approach (Health New Zealand, 2026c; MPI, 2026b).

For routine cleaning, avoid creating dust and splashes. Wear gloves and suitable work clothing, protect cuts, and use eye and respiratory protection when the task or current guidance requires it. Do not eat, drink, smoke or vape while handling bird-contaminated material. Wash hands and change contaminated clothing when the job is finished.

Roof work, enclosed tanks and heavily contaminated sites may require experienced contractors. No maintenance job is important enough to place volunteers at unnecessary risk. After cleaning, check first-flush devices, screens, lids, filters and treatment systems before returning the water supply to normal use.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Who is responsible for the rainwater system at your marae, and when should volunteers stop and seek specialist or public-health advice?

REMEMBER THIS

Clean thoughtfully, avoid dust and splashing, and protect the people who protect the marae water supply.

Key sources:

Health New Zealand (2026c); MPI (2026b); Taumata Arowai (2025a, 2026).

Working Bees Around the Marae

Working bees bring whaanau together to prepare the marae, maintain buildings and care for the grounds. They may involve mowing, clearing drains, cleaning outdoor furniture, trimming trees, repairing roofs, tidying sheds and removing accumulated bird droppings.

Begin with a short walk around the work area. Ordinary droppings from birds that regularly use the marae are a maintenance issue. Several sick or dead birds, an unusually heavy concentration of fresh droppings, or birds behaving abnormally may require the work to pause while advice is sought (MPI, 2026b, 2026c).

Do not mow, sweep, blow or water-blast directly over sick or dead birds or heavily contaminated material. Use methods that limit dust and splashing, provide appropriate protective equipment and make handwashing available before people eat or move into the wharekai (Health New Zealand, 2026c).

Working bees are also opportunities to notice blocked gutters, open tank lids, damaged screens, wild-bird access to poultry feed and places where pets or tamariki could reach dead wildlife. Sharing those observations strengthens the marae before the next tangihanga, Poukai or hui.

Caring for volunteers is part of caring for the marae. No one should feel pressured to handle a bird or contaminated material when the situation is uncertain.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Could your next working bee begin with a five-minute environmental check and a clear agreement about who will respond if sick or dead birds are found?

REMEMBER THIS

Look before the work begins. Caring for the marae includes protecting the whaanau who maintain it.

Key sources:

Health New Zealand (2026c); MPI (2026b, 2026c).

Planting, Wetland Restoration and Environmental Monitoring

Marae whaanau plant, restore wetlands, monitor water, control pests and care for natural and urban environments throughout the rohe. Birds are expected in these places and healthy birdlife may reflect improving habitat. H5 bird flu is not a reason to stop restoration or monitoring work (Waikato-Tainui, 2020).

Before entering a site, observe it from a distance. If birds appear healthy and the area is normal, continue the activity using ordinary hygiene. If several birds are sick or dead, keep people, cats and dogs away from the immediate area and report the observation before disturbing vegetation, mud or water around the birds (MPI, 2026b, 2026c).

Environmental records can include the date, location, bird species if known, approximate numbers, behaviour and photographs taken from a safe distance. These observations can sit alongside water, climate and tohu records without turning marae volunteers into disease investigators.

Clean visible mud and organic material from boots and equipment before moving to another restoration site, farm, wetland or marae. Cleaning should take place away from waterways so contaminated wash water is not returned to the environment (MPI, 2026c).

Marae knowledge of place is a strength. Recording what is normal helps whaanau recognise when change is significant.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Do your restoration and monitoring records include unusual wildlife observations, and how would that information be shared without publicising sensitive locations?

REMEMBER THIS

Continue caring for the taiao. Observe, record and report unusual bird illness or death without disturbing the site.

Key sources:

MPI (2026b, 2026c); Waikato-Tainui (2020).

Our Dog or Cat Picked Up a Dead Bird

Dogs and cats may investigate, carry, mouth or eat birds before people notice them. Most pets that encounter a dead bird will remain healthy, and most dead birds have not died from H5 bird flu. The cause, however, cannot usually be confirmed by appearance alone (MPI, 2026e).

Do not grab the bird with bare hands. Encourage a dog to release it or remove it using gloves or another barrier when it is safe to do so. Keep tamariki and other animals away and wash hands after dealing with the bird. Avoid close face contact and licking until visible bird material has been removed from the pet and advice sought where necessary.

Record where the bird was found and whether other sick or dead birds were nearby. If several birds are affected, report the location. Do not allow a dog to retrieve birds that were already dead or appeared sick, and keep cats indoors temporarily when unusual bird deaths are being investigated nearby (MPI, 2026e; New Zealand Veterinary Association, 2026).

Contact a veterinarian if the pet ate the bird, had heavy contact or later becomes unwell. Tell the clinic about the bird contact before arriving so it can advise you appropriately.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Does your whaanau know how to remove a dead bird without bare-hand contact and who your local veterinarian is?

REMEMBER THIS

Stay calm, avoid bare-hand contact, record where the bird came from and seek veterinary advice if concerns arise.

Key sources:

MPI (2026e); New Zealand Veterinary Association (2026).

What If My Dog or Cat Becomes Sick?

H5 bird flu infection in dogs and cats is uncommon, and most illness in pets will have another cause. Bird exposure becomes important information when an animal becomes unwell after carrying, eating or having close contact with a sick or dead bird (MPI, 2026e; WOA, 2024).

Possible signs reported in infected mammals include unusual tiredness, loss of appetite, fever, coughing, sneezing, eye or nose discharge, rapid or difficult breathing, vomiting or diarrhoea. Neurological signs may include weakness, difficulty walking, tremors, loss of coordination or seizures. These signs are not unique to H5 bird flu and require veterinary assessment (New Zealand Veterinary Association, 2026; WOA, 2024).

Contact your veterinarian promptly and explain when and where the bird contact occurred, whether the bird was sick or already dead, and whether other birds were affected. Keep the pet away from other animals and avoid contact with saliva, vomit, faeces or contaminated fur until advice is received.

Do not attempt to diagnose H5 bird flu yourself. Early veterinary advice protects the pet, the household and other animals while allowing common and treatable causes of illness to be considered.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Would you recognise a change in your pet and remember to tell the veterinarian about recent contact with a sick or dead bird?

REMEMBER THIS

Most sick pets do not have H5 bird flu. Illness after bird contact should be assessed promptly by a veterinarian.

Key sources:

MPI (2026e); New Zealand Veterinary Association (2026); WOA (2024).

What If I Become Sick After Bird Exposure?

Most people who spend time around birds will never become infected with H5 bird flu. The people of greatest concern are those who have had close, unprotected contact with infected birds, body fluids, droppings or heavily contaminated environments (Health New Zealand, 2026a, 2026c; WHO, 2024).

After a meaningful exposure, watch for fever or chills, cough, sore throat, runny or blocked nose, muscle aches, headache, unusual tiredness, red or irritated eyes, and shortness of breath. Nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea may also occur. These symptoms can be caused by many common illnesses and do not, by themselves, mean a person has H5 bird flu (Health New Zealand, 2026c).

If symptoms develop after close bird exposure, contact Healthline or a healthcare provider promptly and explain the exposure before attending in person. Tell them what happened, where and when it occurred, whether the bird was sick or dead, and what protection was used. Call 111 for severe breathing difficulty or another medical emergency.

While seeking advice, reduce close contact with others where practical, wash hands, cover coughs and sneezes, and follow the instructions provided by health professionals. The exposure story is as important as the symptoms.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Would your whaanau remember to tell a clinician about bird exposure rather than reporting only the symptoms?

REMEMBER THIS

If you become unwell after close contact with a sick or dead bird, seek advice and clearly explain the exposure.

Key sources:

Health New Zealand (2026a, 2026c); WHO (2024).

Children, Weavers and Feathers

Feathers may be treasured by tamariki and collected by weavers, artists and whaanau for cultural, educational or personal purposes where collection is lawful. Their cultural significance remains, but the health of the bird and the place where the feather is found also matter.

A naturally moulted feather found in an otherwise normal environment is different from a feather attached to or lying beside a sick or dead bird. Feathers can be contaminated by droppings, saliva, blood, mud or the place where a bird died. Do not collect feathers from a bird of unknown death or from an area with unusual bird mortality (MPI, 2026c, 2026k).

Teach tamariki to stop, step back and tell an adult rather than touching a sick or dead bird or feathers around it. For weavers and others seeking culturally significant feathers, record the location and seek advice from MPI and the relevant wildlife authority before collection, movement or treatment when the situation is uncertain. Native birds and their feathers may also be protected under the Wildlife Act 1953.

This approach does not diminish the taonga. It recognises that the story and condition of the bird travel with the feather.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

How are feathers received, stored or used by your whaanau, and who would be consulted if a significant feather were associated with an unexplained bird death?

REMEMBER THIS

A feather from an uncertain death carries the uncertainty of the bird and the place it came from.

Key sources:

MPI (2026c, 2026k); Wildlife Act 1953.

Backyard Chickens and Pet Birds

Marae and whaanau may keep chickens, ducks, turkeys, pigeons or pet birds for eggs, companionship, education or everyday life. H5 bird flu is not a reason to stop keeping birds. It is a reason to know what is normal for them and reduce avoidable contact with wild birds (MPI, 2026e, 2026j).

Owners often notice early changes such as birds becoming quiet, eating less, laying fewer eggs, developing swollen heads or breathing problems, losing coordination or dying unexpectedly. These signs can be caused by many poultry diseases, but several affected birds or sudden deaths require prompt advice.

Protect feed and drinking water from wild birds where practicable, keep housing clean and prevent wild ducks or other birds from sharing ponds, feeders and drinkers. Clean footwear and equipment before moving between flocks, and do not introduce or give away birds when illness is present or unexplained.

If birds become sick or die unexpectedly, contact MPI or a veterinarian and describe what has changed. Do not sell, gift, move or eat affected birds while the cause remains uncertain.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Do you know the normal appetite, egg production and behaviour of your birds, and could wild birds access their feed or water?

REMEMBER THIS

Know your birds, protect their feed and water, and seek advice early when several become sick or die unexpectedly.

Key sources:

MPI (2026e, 2026j).

Protecting the Wharekai

The wharekai is where manaakitanga is experienced through food, work and relationships. Protecting it requires attention to what enters the kitchen, how raw food is handled and what may be carried in from the wider marae environment.

Hunting clothing, wetland boots, dog gear, traps, crates and field equipment should not be placed in food preparation or storage areas. Create a practical outdoor place where muddy or contaminated gear can be left until it is cleaned. Do not bring found birds, feathers from uncertain deaths or unverified carcasses into the wharekai (MPI, 2026c).

Ringawera should know the source of poultry entering the kitchen. Raw birds must be contained, kept away from ready-to-eat food, prepared with clean equipment and cooked thoroughly. Rainwater used for food preparation must also come from a maintained and appropriately treated supply (MPI, 2026d; Taumata Arowai, 2026).

Good communication protects the wharekai. A concern about a gifted bird, a contaminated water supply or a field exposure should be raised before preparation continues. No one should feel whakamā about stopping and asking a question when many people may be affected.

Protecting the wharekai protects the mana of the marae and everyone welcomed through its doors.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Where does field gear enter your marae, and who has the authority to pause food preparation when the source of food or water is uncertain?

REMEMBER THIS

The wharekai is a protected space. Keep field contamination out and ensure every bird and water source has a story that can be trusted.

Key sources:

MPI (2026c, 2026d); Taumata Arowai (2026).

Questions Whaanau May Ask

Can we still fish, gather kai and spend time in the taiao? Yes. Birds naturally share these places with us. Continue normal activities when birds appear healthy, but keep away from unusual groups of sick or dead birds and seek current advice for the immediate area (MPI, 2026c).

Can we still hunt birds? Lawful hunting may continue under current rules. Do not harvest birds that appear sick, behave abnormally or were found already dead. Check current hunting and MPI advice before going out (MPI, 2026c).

Can we accept birds gifted to the marae? Yes, when the source, lawful harvest, condition and handling are known. Do not receive a bird for kai when its story is incomplete.

Can we eat supermarket chicken, turkey, duck and eggs? Yes. Commercial products remain safe when stored correctly, handled hygienically and cooked thoroughly (MPI, 2026f).

Is every dead bird an H5 case? No. Birds die for many reasons. Avoid unnecessary contact and report unusual clusters rather than trying to diagnose them.

What if my pet brings home a bird? Avoid bare-hand contact, record where it came from and contact a veterinarian if your pet becomes unwell (MPI, 2026e).

Can children and weavers collect feathers? Do not collect feathers associated with a sick or dead bird or unusual mortality. Check legal requirements for protected species.

What number do we call? Report unusual sick or dead wild birds to MPI on 0800 80 99 66. Call Healthline on 0800 611 116 for health advice and 111 for an emergency.

REMEMBER THIS

Most birds are healthy. Most people will never encounter H5 bird flu. Knowledge, observation and informed decisions are stronger than fear.

Five Things Every Marae Should Remember

1. Continue living with the taiao.	H5 bird flu is not a reason to stop fishing, gathering, hunting lawfully, planting, restoring or monitoring. Healthy birds belong in these environments.
2. Observe first, then decide.	Know what is normal and pause when several birds are sick or dead or behaviour is unusual.
3. Know the source and the story.	Do not touch, prepare, receive or eat a bird when its source, death or handling cannot be confidently explained.
4. Safe kai protects everyone.	Keep raw poultry separate, do not wash it and cook it thoroughly.
5. Stop contamination from travelling.	Clean hands, boots, tools, vehicles and pet gear before moving into the wharekai, home, another flock or another part of the taiao.

Preparedness is not fear. It is having enough knowledge to recognise when something is unusual and to protect whaanau, marae and taiao while everyday life continues (MPI, 2026k; Waikato-Tainui, 2020).

Current Advice and Important Contacts

Unusual sick or dead wild birds

Ministry for Primary Industries exotic pest and disease hotline: 0800 80 99 66. Report groups of three or more sick or dead wild birds and follow the current online reporting guidance.

Human health advice

Healthline: 0800 611 116. Tell the adviser about any close contact with a sick or dead bird. Call 111 for severe breathing difficulty or another medical emergency.

Sick dogs, cats or backyard birds

Contact your veterinarian before attending and explain any contact with sick or dead birds. MPI may also provide advice for bird owners and pets.

Native or protected wildlife

Follow MPI reporting advice. DOC may become involved where protected wildlife or conservation sites are affected.

Marae drinking water

Use current Taumata Arowai guidance and contact your drinking-water adviser, treatment provider or public-health service when contamination is suspected.

Information changes:

Check current MPI, Health New Zealand, Taumata Arowai and DOC advice before acting during an H5 event. Do not rely on social-media diagnosis or old instructions.

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