

**21– 04 – 2024**

**News:** H5N1 bird flu

- H5N1 bird flu, a highly pathogenic virus, has been spreading globally, posing a significant threat to birds and wildlife.

## **H5N1 Bird Flu**

- Avian influenza A (H5N1) or H5B1 Bird Flu is a **highly pathogenic virus that primarily circulates among birds but can infect mammals.**
- H5N1 **originated from a virus outbreak in China in 1996 and rapidly evolved into a highly pathogenic strain.**
- **Since 2020, it has spread across Europe, Africa, Asia, North America, South America, and even mainland Antarctica.**
- **India experienced the first H5N1 outbreak in the State of Maharashtra and Gujarat in 2015.**

### **Impact on Animals**

- **Wild birds, including endangered species like California condors, have been severely affected by H5N1.**
- **The main species affected used to be chicken.**

- Marine mammals, such as sea lions and dolphins, have suffered mass deaths in regions like Chile and Peru.
- Mammals like foxes, pumas, bears in North America, and farmed minks in Spain and Finland, have also been infected.

### **Human Risk and Spread Factors**

- While rare, humans can contract bird flu, primarily through contact with infected birds.
- Climate change may exacerbate the spread of the virus, altering bird behaviour and increasing interactions between bird species.

### **World Health Organization (WHO) Risk Assessment**

- While the virus does not easily infect humans, sporadic cases continue to occur, mainly linked to poultry exposure.
- Human-to-human transmission remains rare, but the potential for further cases exists, particularly in regions where the virus is endemic in poultry.
- WHO assesses the overall risk to the general population as low but emphasises the importance of surveillance and risk management.

### **Preventive Measures and Recommendations**

- WHO advises the public to avoid high-risk environments like live animal markets and practise good hand hygiene.
- Prompt reporting of sick animals and avoiding consumption of sick poultry are recommended.
- Individuals exposed to infected birds or environments should seek medical care promptly.