

# Downeast Public Health Council

## Newsletter

April 2023



### Browntail Moth Hairs Pose Risk for Spring Outdoor Activities

Maine CDC and Forest Service Urge Precautions Outside

Browntail moth caterpillars shed tiny toxic hairs that can cause a skin rash like poison ivy. The hairs remain toxic in the environment for up to three years. When hairs become airborne, they may cause trouble breathing and other respiratory problems, if inhaled. The Maine Forest Service has found evidence of browntail moth in all 16 Maine counties.

As people head outside in the warmer weather, they should take precautions against increased risk from these toxic browntail moth hairs. The greatest risk for exposure is between April and July when caterpillars are most active. Hairs can land anywhere, including on trees, gardens, lawns, outdoor furniture, and decks. They may also be in the air. Activities like mowing, raking, and sweeping can stir up the hairs.

Most individuals affected by the hairs develop a rash that lasts for a few hours up to several days. In more sensitive individuals, the rash can be severe and last for weeks. This can be severe and require emergency medical attention. Treatment focuses on relieving symptoms and eliminating ongoing exposure.

Browntail moth caterpillars are easy to identify. They are dark brown with white stripes along the sides and two red-orange dots on the back. Younger caterpillars lack these white stripes.

#### Precautions to take to reduce exposure:

Avoid places infested by caterpillars. Visit the [Interactive Browntail Moth Dashboard](#) to see where the Maine Forest Service notes high activity.

- When performing outdoor activities that may stir up caterpillar hairs, aim for damp days or spray vegetation down with a hose. The moisture helps keep the hairs from becoming airborne while working.
- Cover face with respirator and goggles. Tightly secure clothing around the neck, wrists, and ankles.
- Take cool showers and change clothes after outdoor activities in infested areas.
- Dry laundry inside to avoid hairs embedding into clothing.

Browntail Moth Cocoons:



#### For more information:

- Contact 211 Maine for answers to FAQs:
  - Dial 211 (or 207-874-2211)
  - Text your zip code to 898-211
- [Maine CDC Browntail Moth Webpage](#)
- [Maine Forest Service Browntail Moth Webpage](#)

Maine Health Alert Notice Public Health Advisory Browntail moths: [read here](#)

Citation: Maine CDC and Maine Forest Service (April 13, 2023) *Browntail Moth Hairs Pose Risk for Spring Outdoor Activities*

## HPAI CURRENT RISK



### Status of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Maine

The risk for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) remains high in Maine, and backyard flock and commercial operators are urged to prevent contact between domestic and wild birds by bringing them indoors and ensuring their outdoor areas are fully enclosed. There is little evidence to suggest HPAI is being spread from farm to farm (lateral transmission). The virus is very prevalent in the environment in wild birds so flock owners need to practice strong biosecurity. HPAI is spread directly through wild bird droppings and indirectly through feed, water sources, and bedding that may have been exposed to the droppings.

More information to enhance biosecurity is available [here](#).

What are the signs of HPAI in birds?

Sudden death without clinical signs; Lack of energy and appetite; Decreased egg production or soft-shelled or misshapen eggs; Swelling of the head, comb, eyelid, wattles, and hocks; Purple discoloration of wattles, comb, and legs; Nasal discharge, coughing, and sneezing; Incoordination; or Diarrhea.

Report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to State/Federal officials, either through your [state veterinarian](#) or through the USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593.

Receive DCAF updates and alerts regarding the status of avian influenza in Maine by opting into the [Avian Influenza email list](#).

Information adapted from the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry [website](#)

### Next Downeast Public Council Meeting

Friday, May 19, 2023

9:00 - 11:00 AM

Hybrid Meeting at [Eagle Hill Institute](#)

For Council Meeting information, please contact [Al May](#) or [Abby van Ham](#)



[Downeast Public Health Council Facebook Page](#)

[Downeast Public Health Council Website](#)

[Maine CDC Downeast District Website](#)

To become a member of the Downeast Public Health Council please fill out our [Membership Application](#).

### Downeast Public Health Priority Committees & Collaborations

**Health Literacy Committee:** Angela Fochesato, Chair

**Hancock County Triad Coalition:** Jo Cooper

**Downeast Cancer Patient Navigation Steering Committee:** Maria Donahue, Chair

**Palliative Care and Hospice Committee:** Al May, Chair

**Emergency Planning:** Andrew Sankey, Chair

**Healthy Aging Committee:** Helen Burlock, Chair

### Preventing Lyme Disease in Maine

The easiest way to avoid tickborne disease is preventing tick bites.

1. Know tick habitat and use caution in areas where ticks may live.
2. Wear light-colored clothing that covers arms and legs.
3. Use an approved repellent: see <https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/index.html> for more information.
4. Perform tick checks on yourself, family members and pets daily and after any outdoor activities. Take a shower after exposure to a tick habitat to wash off any crawling ticks.

For an interactive educational aid, please click [here](#).

Lyme disease information available at [Maine CDC Lyme Disease website](#).

For additional questions, please call Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821 or email [disease.reporting@maine.gov](mailto:disease.reporting@maine.gov).



Adult American dog ticks are chestnut brown with white spots or streaks on their backs. Unfed adults are about 1/8-inch long. Engorged females become slate gray and may expand to a length of 1/2-inch.

### Testing for Lead in K-12 School Drinking Water

The issue of lead in school drinking water has received a lot of attention in recent years. This is because school-age children are among those particularly vulnerable to health and developmental problems after exposure to high levels of lead.

With the passage of Maine Public Law 2019 Ch. 158 (*An Act to Strengthen Testing for Lead in School Drinking Water*), the Maine Legislature has mandated that all K-12 schools in Maine test their drinking water for the presence of lead. The Drinking Water Program has coordinated the sampling effort and has used a federal grant to pay for the water sample analysis. Sampling took place during the 2021-2022 school year and was extended into the fall of 2022. To see school sampling results or see if a school has sampled view the [Interactive Map of Results](#)

To see results by School and tap location, search this [pdf](#).

To learn more about lead poisoning and available resources, visit the Maine CDC's [Childhood Lead Poisoning Website](#).

### Spring is the Time to Check Wells

All wells derive water from aquifers. An aquifer is a zone below the earth's surface that can provide a usable quantity of water. If you have questions or concerns about your well, had any broken/burst pipes over the winter impacting your well, have questions about well disinfection or just need general assistance, the Drinking Water Program can help.

The Drinking Water Program can provide free help to private well owners who have questions about their wells, water sampling, and water treatment. Call the Private Well Technical Assistance Specialist at (207) 592-3190.

Or visit their [website](#)