

Fact Sheet

Avian Influenza

How to Protect Birds from Avian Influenza



What is Avian Influenza?



Avian influenza (AI) or “bird flu” is a virus that infects domestic poultry, such as chickens, turkeys, quail, and geese, and wild birds such as shore birds and waterfowl.

AI viruses are divided into two groups – highly pathogenic (HPAI) and low pathogenic (LPAI) – based on the ability of the virus to produce disease and the severity of illness it can cause. HPAI spreads rapidly and has a high death rate in birds. LPAI causes only minor illness and occurs naturally in migratory waterfowl. The concern is that some LPAI virus strains are capable of mutating into HPAI viruses.

HPAI viruses are considered exotic or foreign to the United States because they do not occur naturally here. HPAI has been detected and eradicated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) three times: in 1924, 1983, and 2004. In December 2014, the USAA confirmed the presence of HPAI viruses in both domestic and wild birds in the United States.

How Does Avian Influenza Spread?

HPAI spreads quickly by direct, bird-to-bird contact. The disease can also spread indirectly, for example, when birds come in contact with contaminated surfaces or materials.

Migratory waterfowl (i.e., wild ducks and geese), smuggled poultry and poultry products, and the movement of poultry, poultry equipment, and people are potential sources for introducing the disease to domestic birds. The bird flu virus can travel on manure, egg flats, crates, other farming materials/equipment, and people who have picked up the virus on their clothing, shoes, or hands.

What are the Signs of Avian Influenza?

HPAI can strike quickly and spread rapidly without any warning. When infected birds do show signs, here is what to look for:

- § Lack of energy or appetite
- § Decreased egg production and/or soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- § Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks



USDA file photo
Purple discoloration of the comb could indicate HPAI.



USDA file photo
Birds affected by HPAI could show swelling of the head, wattles, combs, and face.



USDA file photo
Hemorrhaging of the skin and legs is just one of the signs birds might exhibit when infected with the HPAI virus.



USDA file photo
Nasal discharge (a runny nose) can be a sign of HPAI.

- § Purple discoloration of the wattles, comb and legs
- § Runny nose, coughing and sneezing
- § Stumbling or falling down
- § Diarrhea
- § Sudden death without any clinical signs

Steps to Take to Prevent the Spread of Avian Influenza

- § **Keep distance.** Restrict access to property and birds. Fencing the bird area can help to keep flock safe from predators and to keep out other birds that could potentially spread disease. If visitors have birds of their own, do not let them near birds. Birds should not have contact with wild birds and migratory waterfowl because they can carry germs and diseases. Be sure that they do not share a water source and keep food protected.
- § **Keep it clean.** Wash hands thoroughly before and after working with birds. Wear clean clothes and scrub shoes with disinfectant. Clean and disinfect equipment, including cages and tools that come into contact with birds and their droppings. Remove manure before disinfecting equipment. Properly dispose of dead birds.
- § **Do not haul disease home.** Buy birds from a reputable source to ensure the purchase of healthy birds. Keep new birds separate from the rest of the flock for at least 30 days. If birds have been to a fair or exhibition, keep them separated from the flock for 2 weeks after the event.
- § **Do not borrow disease from neighbors.** Do not share garden equipment or poultry supplies with neighbors or other bird owners. If bringing these items home, clean and disinfect them before reaching the property.
- § **Know the warning signs.** While it may be hard to tell if a bird has AI, checking birds frequently for symptoms a person may be able to detect AI early and can help to prevent the spread of disease.

What to do if AI is Suspected

Report sick birds immediately, do not wait. If birds are sick or dying, call a veterinarian. If flock is experiencing severe illness or multiple deaths contact MDARD at **(800) 292-3939** or for after-hours emergencies call **(517) 373-0440**.

If collecting the bird for testing, please use disposable rubber gloves to put the specimen in a double bag. To reduce the risk of transmission of diseases, always avoid barehanded contact when handling dead birds. If gloves are not available, turn a plastic shopping bag inside out and scoop up the specimen with the bag. Wash hands with soap and water. Freeze the specimen. If freezing is not possible, it must at least be kept cool (refrigerated or on ice). It is also important to make sure that the specimen remains dry.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES www.michigan.gov/dnr

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE www.usda.gov