

# Avian influenza

Information for Yukon poultry producers

Date: May 5, 2022

## What is avian influenza (AI)?

AI is a contagious viral infection, also known as “bird flu” or “avian flu.” It can infect wild birds including water fowl, raptors and owls, as well as domestic poultry. It is naturally carried by wild and migratory birds worldwide, but some years it is more infectious than others – just like the flu can be for humans. This year, some strains of AI is highly pathogenic and causing illness and death in bird populations.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been found in other parts of Canada this year, and is increasing as migratory birds return north.

What is avian influenza (AI)?

## What should I do to protect my birds?

Protecting poultry means doing everything you can to lessen the chance that you (or others) bring AI to the birds on your clothing, boots, hands or equipment, or by bringing in new birds that are already infected. You also need to protect your poultry from direct contact with wild birds or contact with areas where wild birds have been. To protect your birds:

- Prevent wild birds from being in contact with your poultry and their food and water by keeping your birds indoors or using overhead netting and appropriate fencing;
- Frequently clean poultry coops, water dishes, feeders, and your clothing and boots;
- Learn to recognize the signs of avian influenza in your birds:
  - Lack of energy, movement or appetite;
  - Decreased egg production;
  - Swelling around the head, neck and eyes;
  - Coughing, gasping for air or sneezing;
  - Nervous signs, tremors, or lack of coordination;
  - Diarrhea; and
  - Sudden death.
- Limit visitors to your farm and be aware that visitors can bring AI in on clothing, boots, hands and equipment;
- Do not transfer poultry or poultry products from one farm to another;
- Avoid having bird feeders and duck ponds close to poultry barns as feeders attract wild birds; and
- Protect yourself and your farm workers by wearing PPE when working with sick birds.

Read the [National Avian On-Farm Biosecurity Standard](#).

## Can humans be infected?

AI can infect humans, though it is rare. People most at risk are those handling sick or dead birds for prolonged periods without proper personal protective equipment (PPE). As a precaution – and certainly if your poultry becomes ill – wear PPE when handling birds. If you are ill, contact your physician.

## How do I report suspected AI?

If you see wild birds looking sick, injured or dead call the TIPP line at 1-800-661-0525 and report the location of the bird.

If you have sick or dead poultry contact your veterinarian or the Animal Health Unit (867-667-5600 or [animalhealth@yukon.ca](mailto:animalhealth@yukon.ca)).

AI is a federally reportable disease. If a pet bird or domestic poultry is suspected to have AI, the [reportable hazard report](#) form will need to be completed and you or your veterinarian should contact the Animal Health Unit (867-667-5600 or [animalhealth@yukon.ca](mailto:animalhealth@yukon.ca)) or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (contact CFIA district veterinarian at 250-719-6855).

## Can my birds get AI from wild birds or other domestic poultry?

Yes. Domestic poultry (ducks, chickens, turkeys and quail) can get sick with AI. Your birds can become sick after contact with infected poultry, or the disease can spread from wild birds (waterfowl, eagles, ravens, etc.) that may or may not look sick.

## How long will AI be a threat?

The strain of AI causing the current outbreak in Canada is carried and spread mostly by migrating wild birds. Preventing avian flu in your backyard or commercial flock should be a focus until we know that HPAI is no longer circulating. For this year: protect your flock from now through fall migration and into the early winter. Keeping your flock protected from infectious disease should always be a part of poultry management.

## Where has AI been found?

Cases of AI have been diagnosed in domestic poultry in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. New cases are reported daily and we expect the case count and affected jurisdictions to increase – the situation continues to evolve.

## What's happening on poultry farms where AI is suspected?

Since AI is a federally reportable disease, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) leads the response to suspected infections in domestic poultry. When AI is suspected on a farm the CFIA will:

- Impose movement restrictions, for example, quarantines
- Submit samples for testing
- Investigate the farm records and management practices
- Coordinate humane destruction and disposal of animals
- Provide guidance on cleaning and disinfection procedures

Compensation may be available for animals that are ordered destroyed. Any farms that are significant contacts (e.g., sharing equipment or transferring animals) with an infected farm may also be quarantined.

## Are mobile field poultry pens at a higher risk?

Yes. One of the key ways to minimize risk to your poultry is to prevent contact with wild birds, or areas shared with wild birds. Keep your poultry's food and water (drinking water or pond water) sources protected from access to wild birds. Keep your poultry indoors or use overhead netting and appropriate fencing.

## **What do I look for when processing birds?**

Domestic poultry infected with avian influenza become very sick over a short period and would likely be identified prior to slaughter or during the ante mortem exam. Poultry with any symptoms of AI must not be slaughtered for human consumption. As always, meat inspection with a territorial meat inspector is available at certified abattoir(s) for meat destined for retail sale.

## **How should I cook/clean to prevent AI?**

You should not consume sick birds. Disinfect any surfaces the meat as touched. In general, good hygiene practices (disinfecting surfaces, hand washing and cooking to food safe standards) will help control the spread of the virus.

## **What should I ask bird suppliers?**

It is reasonable to be cautious about bringing in new stock, especially if you are bringing in poultry from more than one source or adding new birds to your existing flock. Segregate new poultry should from your existing flock for 30 days and monitor daily for signs of illness.

You can ask suppliers about their disease control measures and ask them to confirm that they are not under any federally imposed movement restrictions.

## **Who should I contact if issues arise?**

If you have sick or dead poultry contact your veterinarian or the Animal Health Unit ([animalhealth@yukon.ca](mailto:animalhealth@yukon.ca) or 867-667-5600), or the CFIA District Veterinarian (Corinna Harvey) at 1-250-719-6855.

If you have questions about improving your biosecurity the Animal Health Unit ([animalhealth@yukon.ca](mailto:animalhealth@yukon.ca) or 867-667-5600).

If you or someone who works with your poultry gets sick, contact your physician or call 811.

