
Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza FAQs

Q: What is Avian Influenza?

A: Avian influenza is an infectious disease of birds caused by a group of influenza viruses. These viruses naturally circulate in wild birds, such as waterfowl and shorebirds, which can carry the virus without showing any signs of disease. There are many strains of avian influenza, which are classified into two categories: low pathogenic (LPAI) strains which typically cause little or no clinical signs in domestic poultry, and highly pathogenic (HPAI) strains which can cause severe disease and potentially high mortality in domestic poultry.

Q: What are the clinical signs of Avian Influenza?

A: Most wild birds that are infected with avian influenza viruses do not show signs of disease. However, HPAI strains can occasionally cause disease in some wildlife species including swans, diving ducks, gulls, geese, grebes, raptors, vultures, cranes, and terns. In these birds, typical symptoms include swimming in circles, head tilt, and lack of coordination. Game bird species such as turkeys, grouse, and quail may also be susceptible to HPAI with signs more like poultry such as swelling of the head, diarrhea, vomiting, moving slowly, ruffled feathers, respiratory signs, and not eating. Some affected wild birds are found dead.

Q: Where does Avian Influenza come from/how do my birds become infected?

Avian influenza is caused by an influenza type A virus which can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and wild birds (especially waterfowl).¹ Infected birds can shed avian influenza A viruses in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with the virus as it is shed by infected birds. They also can become infected through contact with surfaces that are contaminated with virus from infected birds.²

Q: Can humans be infected with Avian Influenza?

A: Although rare, some HPAI strains can infect people, so it is important to protect yourself. The main protection for the public is to avoid handling sick or dead birds and keep your distance from wildlife. See the [CDC website](#) for more information on protective actions for people.

Q: How can I protect my birds from Avian Influenza?

A: (1) Professionals and individuals handling birds in areas where HPAI is active should wear protective gear such as gloves, a face mask and eye protection when handling wild or domestic species with a high risk for carrying avian influenza or birds found sick or dead. Be sure to wash your hands and

¹ <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/ai>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-in-birds.htm#:~:text=Infected%20birds%20can%20shed%20avian,with%20virus%20from%20infected%20birds.>

disinfect equipment after handling. There are many disinfectants suitable for use against avian influenza viruses. Ensure that equipment and surfaces are cleaned with soap and water prior to applying disinfectants. Disinfectants require a specific amount of contact time to kill the virus. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the product that you use.

(2) By practicing good biosecurity, you can reduce the risk of people, animals, equipment, or vehicles carrying infectious diseases onto your property, either accidentally or on purpose. You will also help protect other flocks by preventing the spread of disease.

Q: Is there a threat to food safety due to Avian Influenza?

A: The risk to human health associated with the current outbreaks is low according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) with no reported cases of human illness. It is safe to eat properly prepared poultry and poultry products. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that poultry and wild birds are cooked to a temperature of 165 °F.