

Avian Influenza: Stop the Spread

What Is AI?

Avian influenza (AI) viruses can infect chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, ducks, geese and guinea fowl, as well as a wide variety of other birds. Migratory waterfowl have proved to be a natural reservoir for the less infectious strains of the disease known as low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI). Pathogenicity is the ability to cause disease. AI viruses can be classified into low pathogenicity (LPAI) and high pathogenicity (HPAI) based on the severity of the illness they cause. HPAI spreads extremely quickly and kills most infected birds. Once the virus is established, it can spread rapidly from flock to flock. However, some LPAI virus strains are capable of changing into HPAI viruses. This is why all types of AI are considered a major threat to poultry. The goal of poultry growers should be to keep all forms of AI from becoming established in the U.S. poultry population.

What Are the Signs?

The clinical signs of birds affected with all forms of AI may show one or more of the following:

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production
- Soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs, and legs
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing, sneezing
- Lack of coordination
- Diarrhea

Note: Many birds with LPAI (the mild form) may not show any signs of disease.

How Is AI Spread?

Exposure of poultry to migratory waterfowl, to poultry from countries where AI is present, to poultry equipment, and people pose risks for introducing AI into U.S. poultry. Once introduced, the disease can be spread from bird to bird by direct contact. AI viruses can also be spread by manure, equipment, vehicles, egg flats, crates, and people whose clothing or shoes have come in contact with the virus. AI viruses can remain viable at moderate temperatures for long periods in the environment and can survive indefinitely in frozen material. It is important to know the warning signs of bird diseases such as avian influenza (AI) or "bird flu" and exotic Newcastle disease or END (a disease with signs similar to AI). While it may be hard to tell if your bird has one of these diseases, if you know the signs, you may be able to tell if something is wrong. Early detection can help prevent the spread of disease.

Report Sick Birds at:

1-866-536-7593 OR **NC Department of Agriculture 919-733-7601**

For complete information see: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/birdbiosecurity

Protecting your birds is the best defense against AI and END. The following preventative measures can help your birds stay healthy if practiced regularly.

Keep It CLEAN.

If you practice these steps and make them part of your bird care routine, you will be doing a lot to help the health of your flock. These are a few important things to remember:

Wash your hands thoroughly before entering your bird area and before and after working with your birds.

Scrub your shoes with disinfectant. This may seem like too much work, but your boots and shoes can easily track disease to your birds. Or keep a separate pair of shoes or boots near your cages to wear only when working with your birds. Wear clean clothes that you use only when you feed and care for your birds.

Clean cages and change food and water daily.

Clean and disinfect equipment that comes in contact with your birds or their droppings, including cages and tools.

Keep it AWAY.

Restrict access to your property and your birds. Wild birds or new birds you've just purchased could carry diseases that could spread quickly to your flock. Here are some things you can do to keep disease away from your birds:

If **visitors** have birds of their own, do not let them near your birds. Avoid visiting farms or other households with poultry.

If you've been near **other birds or bird owners**, such as at a feed store, pet store, or bird club meeting, clean and disinfect your clothing, shoes, cages, and equipment before going near your birds.

Have your birds been to a **fair or exhibition**? If so, keep them separate from the rest of your flock for at least two weeks after the event. If you've bought new birds, they should be kept separate for at least 30 days. Buy birds from a reputable source so you know you are getting healthy animals.

Properly dispose of dead birds. Bird deaths are a fact of life. But if one of your birds dies, call the county extension agent, State department of agriculture, or your veterinarian for guidance.

Precautions For Cage-Free Poultry

It is recommended that poultry producers who raise birds in outdoor, non-confinement systems should try to prevent contact with wild birds and wild bird droppings.

Birds should not be allowed **access to surface water** that could potentially transmit AI or other avian pathogens through contamination with wild bird excrement.

Implementing preventive measures for these high-risk areas:

Keeping birds indoors

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