

February 11, 2021

## **Avian Influenza – Heightened awareness for Small Flock Owners and Bird Fanciers**

An epidemic of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5 has been affecting countries in Europe, Asia and Africa since August 2020. The epidemic is still progressing and causing severe economic and poultry health impacts. Migratory wild birds are playing a significant role in the source of the outbreaks. According to the [US Geological Survey](#), the global level of HPAI virus detection in wild birds presently is similar to that found during the winter of 2014/2015 when HPAI struck Ontario poultry farms. **Measures taken at this time to improve on-farm biosecurity, including avoiding contact with wild birds, may reduce the likelihood of exposure to your flock.**

For more information on HPAI and the current status, please go to : [2020: OIE - World Organisation for Animal Health](#)

People who raise small flocks or game birds for personal or limited commercial purposes should be aware of the risk of infectious poultry diseases such as avian influenza (AI) to their birds' health. AI can infect domesticated and wild birds, including chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quails, ducks, geese, and guinea fowl. Although unusual, AI can be transmitted from birds to people and from people to birds.

If you are concerned about your health or if you develop influenza-like symptoms after working with sick birds, please contact your health care provider.

Birds become infected when they have direct contact with the discharge from the eyes and nostrils or feces of infected birds, or with contaminated surfaces, food and/or water supplies.

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Agricultural Information Contact Centre  
1-877-424-1300

E-mail : [ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca](mailto:ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca)  
[www.ontario.ca/omafra](http://www.ontario.ca/omafra)

**There is an increased risk of AI infection to poultry flocks and game birds during spring wild bird migration.**

Birds with outdoor access should not share areas with wild ducks, geese, turkeys or shorebirds. Make sure free-range areas do not attract wild waterfowl as ponds or open feeders may become contaminated with wild waterfowl droppings.

Infectious poultry diseases are most often transmitted from one infected flock to another flock by infected birds, people or equipment. Moving infected birds can result in the transmission of AI virus to a new location or flock. During an AI outbreak, or periods of high risk such as wild bird migration, attending poultry events can increase the risk of spreading AI. If infected birds are moved through an auction, show, competition or “swap meet”, then the AI virus can be transferred to multiple new locations. Birds that appear to be healthy can be infected and can transmit AI to other birds before exhibiting any signs of disease themselves.

Be very diligent in observing your birds. Track illnesses and deaths and feed and water consumption. Early detection is critical. Monitor your birds for signs of disease such as depression, decreased feed consumption, drop in egg production, swollen wattles, sneezing, gasping, a discharge from the nose or eyes, diarrhea or sudden death.

**If you have any concerns regarding the health status of your flock, contact your veterinarian immediately.**

**Key steps to reduce the risk of AI infection in your flock include:**

- Avoid attending shows, sales, competitions and swap meets during a disease outbreak.
- Do not allow people who have recently been in contact with other birds (e.g., their own or attending a bird sale or show) to enter the housing area or handle your birds.
- Do not share equipment with other bird owners.
- Keep a log book. If you add new birds to your flock, at any time, make sure that you get their complete background information, including a history of any diseases and vaccinations, and keep the vendor’s contact information in the event that your birds become sick, so they can be traced to their flock of origin.
- Keep new birds or those returning from shows separate and preferably in a different airspace (isolated) for at least 2-4 weeks after returning home and monitor them for signs of illness. Clean and disinfect the cages and equipment used for these birds. Use separate clothing, footwear and equipment for isolated birds, and handle them last. If the same equipment and clothing must be used, clean and disinfect them before and after handling the birds. Wash your hands between the two groups.

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Additional information is available at:

- <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/poultry/smallflock.html>
- <http://inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/diseases/bird-health-basics/eng/1323643634523/1323644740109>