



AVIAN INFLUENZA FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR POULTRY OWNERS

http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/ah/diseases/avian_influenza.html

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza (AI)—the bird flu—is a disease caused by a virus. It can infect chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, ducks, geese, guinea fowl, and a variety of other birds, including migratory waterfowl and pet birds such as parrots. Just like in the human flu season, each year there is a flu season affecting different birds in varying ways.

There are many types of Avian Influenza. AI viruses are classified by two types of surface proteins on the virus particle: H proteins and N proteins. AI is also divided into two forms: Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI) and High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

LPAI is periodically detected in poultry and wild bird populations and poses no serious threat to human health. In birds, LPAI can cause illness, production loss and mortality—but not at the rate of HPAI. The H5 and H7 subtypes of LPAI are of particular concern because they have the ability mutate into HPAI.

HPAI spreads rapidly through birds and can cause severe illness and a high mortality rate between 90-100%, often within 48 hours of exposure to the virus. HPAI can affect humans who have direct contact with sick birds or their excretions. HPAI may also have the potential to mutate into a form that can spread from human to human.

Currently, there is a HPAI subtype called H5N1 that is circulating in Asia, Europe, and Africa. This subtype has caused illness in poultry and in small numbers of people.

Is HPAI H5N1 present in the United States?

No, HPAI H5N1 has not been found in the United States. Other subtypes of AI are periodically found in the U.S. in wild waterfowl. These subtypes usually affect small numbers of birds, generally do not cause obvious illness, and are not considered a human health risk.

What is the government doing to prevent HPAI from entering our state?

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Federal and State Wildlife services are implementing their Avian Influenza response plans. This includes increased surveillance testing of various birds—poultry at auctions and in backyard flocks, wild waterfowl, and reported ill or dead wild and domestic birds. USDA-FSIS (Food Safety Inspection Service) is increasing its inspections of foreign imports at the states' ports, looking for smuggled birds, poultry products, and other high-risk materials, in addition to increased AI surveillance at our poultry slaughter facilities.

How is AI spread?

AI can be spread through the respiratory secretions and feces of infected birds. Some birds, notably waterfowl, are believed to be the reservoirs of Avian Influenza and can shed the virus in their feces without showing symptoms of the disease. Exposure of non-infected birds to infected birds, contaminated equipment, vehicles, or people who have been on AI-infected farms also pose risks for introducing AI into New Jersey. Once introduced, the disease can spread quickly from bird to bird by direct or indirect contact.

What are the symptoms of AI in birds?

Birds affected with any form of AI may show one or more of the following:

- Sudden death without any other clinical signs.
- Lack of energy and appetite, depression
- 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, or gasping for air
- Lack of coordination
- Diarrhea

How long can the AI virus remain infectious?

AI virus can remain infectious in feces for 7 days at 68° F and 35 days at 40° F, and can survive indefinitely in frozen material. One gram of contaminated manure contains enough virus to infect one million birds.

Is there a vaccine for AI? Why can't I vaccinate my poultry now before HPAI H5N1 comes?

There are AI vaccines currently available for poultry that are used in limited situations, such as an outbreak. These vaccines are only issued under the authority of the USDA and the State Veterinarian. There is currently no commercially available vaccine for the H5N1 strain.

If HPAI comes, am I going to be required to keep my poultry inside?

If a diagnosis of the HPAI is found in the state, you may be required to limit the exposure of your birds to wild birds.

Should I be safe and get rid of my poultry now?

No, there is no need to go to that extreme. Use excellent biosecurity practices and common sense on your farm.

How can I keep wild birds away from my poultry? It's not natural to limit their access to the outdoors.

To prevent infection in your birds, you may have to limit contact with wild waterfowl—for example, they could go outside in covered pens.

At the auctions, why are pigeons and doves excluded from testing? Do they get the disease?

Pigeons and doves can be exposed to AI but do not appear to get sick with the disease or shed the virus. Because of this, they can only spread the disease to other birds mechanically (on their feet, feathers, and skin.)

How is AI diagnosed?

If a sample is suspect or positive for AI, a determination will be made whether it is an H5 or H7 subtype, or another subtype of the virus. Confirmatory tests are performed at the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa. Once the tests have confirmed the subtype of the virus and its virulence (ability to kill poultry), a positive diagnosis of either LPAI or HPAI will be made.

What will happen if a diagnosis of H5 or H7 LPAI is confirmed on my farm?

The NJDA, Division of Animal Health's State Veterinarian will work closely with you to determine a plan of action.

Birds housed with the Low Path AI positive bird may be depopulated, and if so, indemnified. Birds in other houses or areas of the farm may be depopulated or started on a Low Path AI Vaccination program. The premises will have to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

Sentinel birds may be placed on the premise. Authorized personnel from the NJDA will test and monitor the health of the sentinel birds for a 21-day period. After this time, the sentinel program will be terminated if no virus has been isolated from the birds.

Throughout this process, biosecurity precautions will be strictly enforced. Restrictions on human and vehicular traffic must be in place, and proper cleaning and disinfection of boots, clothing, equipment, and other items must be employed.

What will happen if a diagnosis of HPAI is confirmed on my farm?

In the event of HPAI, the New Jersey AI Emergency Response Plan will be activated. All appropriate federal and state agencies (USDA, NJ Dept. of Health and Senior Services, Dept. of Environmental Protection, etc.) will be notified, as well as the Governor's office. Municipal and county leaders will be briefed on the specifics of the situation.

The HPAI positive flock will be depopulated, the owner compensated, and the premise cleaned and disinfected.

Authorized State and Federal personnel will monitor and test flocks located within a "Surveillance Zone" for 42 days after the infected premise tests negative. Any other flocks determined to be "at risk" will be depopulated. These flocks could be those contaminated by feed trucks, chicken coops, egg crates, movement of birds or people, a lapse in good biosecurity measures, etc.

Similar to LPAI situations, sentinel birds will be placed on the premise. Authorized personnel from the NJDA will test and monitor the health of the birds during an appropriate test period.

Working with the producer, the State Veterinarian will determine a repopulation schedule for the premise.

What do I do if I see sick or dead birds?

Report sick birds to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

- When in doubt, do not hesitate! Call NJDA at (609) 292-3965 for testing of ill or dead birds. Someone from the Division will get to your farm as soon as possible.
- There are many causes of death in birds. Just because a bird dies, it does not automatically mean that the cause is AI. It is best to have the bird tested.

**New Jersey Department of Agriculture,
Division of Animal Health**
(609) 292-3965 – Office & After-Hours Emergency

**New Jersey Department of Environmental
Protection, Division of Fish and Wildlife**
(609) 292-2965 - Office
1-877-927-6337 - Emergency Hotline

**New Jersey Department of Health and Senior
Services, Infectious and Zoonotic Diseases**
(609) 588-3121 - Office
(609) 392-2020 - After-Hours Emergency

USDA—APHIS, Veterinary Services, New Jersey
(609) 259-8387 – Office & Emergency

USDA—APHIS, Wildlife Services, New Jersey
(908) 735-5654 – Office
(908) 623-7400 – After-Hours Emergency

State and Federal Agency Contact Information: