Maryland
Department of Agriculture

Office of Marketing, Animal Industries and Consumer Services

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Animal Health

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Dear Maryland Poultry Producers:

On Wednesday, November 11, 2026, the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) announced that preliminary testing of a commercial broiler flock in Worcester County returned a presumptive positive result for H5 avian influenza. The virus was identified by MDA's Salisbury Animal Health Laboratory (SAHL), which is part of the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN). Additional testing is being conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) to confirm the presence of the virus.

The affected premises has been placed under quarantine, and the birds have been depopulated to prevent further spread of the disease.

H5N1 continues to circulate among wild bird populations, and the annual fall migration of waterfowl is now beginning, although later than usual due to unseasonably warm autumn temperatures. Several HPAI detections in waterfowl were reported in Delaware on November 2, 2026, serving as a reminder of the ongoing risk posed by migratory birds. While Maryland has not had any recent detections in wild birds, HPAI was confirmed in black vultures in Harford County in April 2026.

These latest detections serve as an important reminder that highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) continues to circulate in wild bird populations and poses an ongoing threat to commercial and backyard poultry operations. The virus continues to be introduced into domestic poultry flocks across the United States. As of November 11, 2026, HPAI has been detected in 2,307 flocks nationwide, including 1,061 commercial poultry operations and 1,246 backyard flocks, across all 50 states and one territory. Since February 2022, more than 200 million birds have been affected.

Protecting Your Flock: Biosecurity Recommendations

All producers should take precautions to prevent contact between domestic poultry and wild birds. **MDA strongly recommends that organic poultry producers move their flocks indoors and maintain them in confinement until the risk associated with outdoor access can be reassessed.** Producers who observe black vultures or wild waterfowl near their poultry operations are also encouraged to keep their birds indoors.

If indoor housing is not available for backyard flocks, outdoor enclosures should be covered with tarps or other suitable materials to minimize exposure to wild bird droppings and prevent direct contact with wild birds.

All poultry producers are urged to remain vigilant and implement the following biosecurity measures:

- **Maintain rigorous biosecurity practices** to minimize the risk of introducing disease onto your farm.
- **Monitor flock health closely** and watch for signs of illness or unusual mortality.
- **Limit contact with wild birds**, particularly waterfowl and black vultures.
- **Control farm access.** Limit, monitor, and record the movement of people, vehicles, and animals on and off your property. Allow only essential workers and vehicles onto the farm.
- **Avoid unnecessary farm visits and travel.** Do not visit other poultry operations, and limit unnecessary travel off the farm.
- **Clean and disinfect equipment, vehicles, footwear, and other items** that come into contact with your birds. For farms with multiple animal species (cattle, poultry, horses, etc.), disinfect each area separately and manage each area as a separate premises.
- **Isolate sick birds or animals** and contact your veterinarian for guidance.
- **Immediately report unexplained illness or increased mortality** in your flock to MDA at 410-841-5810 (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

Recognizing the Signs of HPAI in Birds

Poultry producers should be familiar with the clinical signs of HPAI and monitor their flocks for any unusual changes in health or behavior. Signs may include:

- Sudden death without any prior signs of illness
- Lack of energy or appetite
- Decreased egg production or soft-shelled, misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the eyelids, comb, wattles, or shanks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, comb, or legs
- Gasping for air or difficulty breathing
- Nasal discharge, coughing, or sneezing
- Twisting of the head and neck (torticollis)
- Stumbling, loss of coordination, or falling down
- Diarrhea

Reporting Sick or Dead Poultry

If you observe signs of illness or experience increased mortality in your flock, take the following steps:

Commercial Poultry Producers:
Follow your company's established procedures for reporting signs of disease or increased mortality. Contact your company representative promptly.

Backyard Poultry Owners:
If you observe any of the signs of HPAI in your flock, contact the MDA Animal Health Program by email or telephone:

- Email: md.birdflu@maryland.gov or animalhealth.mda@maryland.gov
- Phone: 410-841-5810

When reporting, please provide your contact information, flock size, location, and a description of your concerns and any observed signs of illness.

Important: Do not bring sick or dead birds to the MDA Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratories or move them off your property. Contact MDA first so we can determine whether testing is necessary and provide guidance on appropriate next steps.

Reporting and Resources for Wild Birds

- **Wild bird mitigation assistance:** Contact USDA Wildlife Services at 866-487-3297.
- **Report sick or dead wild birds:** Contact the Maryland Department of Natural Resources at 877-620-8367.

Additional information and guidance on avian influenza are available on the USDA APHIS website:

Avian Disease – Resources & Guidance | USDA APHIS

As we move into the fall and winter migration season, continued vigilance and strict biosecurity remain our best defenses against HPAI. Early detection, prompt reporting, and consistent implementation of biosecurity practices are critical to protecting individual flocks and Maryland's poultry industry.

Thank you for your continued cooperation and commitment to protecting Maryland poultry.

Thank you,



Dr. Jennifer P Trout, DVM
Maryland State Veterinarian