



SITUATION UPDATE: 4/27/22

High Path Avian Influenza Confirmed in Maryland Vultures, Wildlife enthusiasts are encouraged to take precautions

UPDATE

Federal laboratory testing has confirmed cases of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI) in samples taken from vultures found dead in Harford County, Md. Following an investigation by the Maryland Departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MDA, MDNR) and the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services, the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory confirmed samples submitted from the recently dead birds tested positive for HPAI.

These detections mark the Delmarva region's first confirmation of HPAI in wild birds since February 17, when the virus was found through wildlife surveillance testing. HPAI was confirmed in a commercial poultry flock in New Castle County, Del., on February 23, triggering a state-federal response between the Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA), MDA, and USDA. A total of six farms have been confirmed positive in Delaware and Maryland, with the most recent confirmation on March 18 in Cecil County, Md.

There is currently minimal risk to public health as there have been no human cases of HPAI in the United States. Avian influenza does not affect poultry meat or egg products, which remain safe to eat.

HPAI is known to be carried by wild birds, especially waterfowl, raptors, and vultures. Avian influenza is a highly contagious airborne respiratory virus that spreads quickly among birds through nasal and eye secretions and manure. If you see sick or dead wild birds, **do not** handle or move them. Report any sick wild birds to **USDA Wildlife Services at (877) 463-6497**.

BACKGROUND

Wild birds can be infected with HPAI and show no signs of illness. Because they may not show signs, the public should not take sick or dead waterfowl, raptors, or vultures to wildlife rehabilitation facilities. If the virus is present in these birds, it could be transferred to other birds currently being rehabilitated.

HPAI can be spread in various ways from flock to flock, including by wild birds, through contact with infected poultry, by equipment, and on the clothing and shoes of caretakers. Considering these new cases and the prevalence of the virus in the wild bird population, all poultry owners need to continue with increased vigilance in protecting their flocks from contracting avian influenza.

KEY BIOSECURITY PRACTICES

- **Clean and disinfect vehicles.** Don't walk through or drive trucks, tractors, or equipment in areas where waterfowl or other wildlife feces may be. If you can't avoid this, clean your shoes, vehicle, and equipment

thoroughly to prevent bringing disease agents back to your flock. This is especially important when visiting with farmers or those who hunt wildfowl, such as when gathering at a local coffee shop, restaurant, or gas station.

- **Remove loose feed.** Don't give wild birds, rodents, and insects a free lunch! Remove spilled or uneaten feed immediately and ensure feed storage units are secure and free of holes. Wild birds can carry HPAI.
- **Keep visitors to a minimum.** Only allow those people who take care of your poultry to come in contact with your birds, including family and friends. Make sure everyone who has contact with your flock follows biosecurity principles.
- **Wash your hands before and after coming in contact with live poultry.** Wash with soap and water (always your first choice). If using a hand sanitizer, remove manure, feathers, and other materials from your hands because disinfectants will not penetrate organic matter or caked-on dirt.
- **Provide disposable boot covers (preferred) or disinfectant footbaths for anyone having contact with your flock.** If using a footbath, remove all droppings, mud, or debris from boots and shoes using a long-handled scrub brush BEFORE stepping into the disinfectant footbath, and always keep it clean.
- **Change clothes before entering poultry areas and before exiting the property.** Visitors should wear protective outer garments or disposable coveralls, boots, and headgear. Shower out and change clothes when leaving the facility.
- **Clean and disinfect tools or equipment before moving them to a new poultry facility.** Before allowing vehicles, trucks, tractors, or tools and equipment (e.g., egg flats and cases) that have come in contact with birds or their droppings to exit the property, ensure they are cleaned and disinfected to prevent contaminated equipment from transporting disease. Do not move or reuse items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected, such as cardboard egg flats.
- **Look for signs of illness.** Know the warning signs of infectious bird diseases.

IF YOU HAVE SICK POULTRY:

- Commercial poultry producers should follow the procedures of contacting the company they grow for when they notice signs of disease.
- Backyard flock owners who notice any signs of HPAI in their flock should contact:
 - In **Delaware**, email the Delaware Poultry Health Hotline at health@delaware.gov or call 302-698-4507 and provide your contact information, size of flock, location, and concerns.
 - In **Maryland**, report any unusual or sudden increases in sick birds to the MDA Animal Health Program at 410-841-5810. Commercial chicken growers and backyard flock owners can email questions about the outbreak to Birdflu@maryland.gov.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For all media requests about HPAI, email: JIC@delaware.gov

Due to biosecurity concerns, no on-site interviews, photos, or videos are allowed. For more information on avian influenza, visit <https://de.gov/poultry> or <https://mda.maryland.gov/Pages/AvianFlu.aspx>.