

Avian Influenza

Following several years of unprecedented levels of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), Great Britain declared freedom for HPAI in March 2024.

While the UK does not currently have outbreaks of HPAI in poultry or other captive birds, officials still detecting cases in wild birds and keepers must remain vigilant and practise stringent biosecurity to protect the health and welfare of their birds. Find out [how to protect your birds - biosecurity guidance](#).

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N5 has been detected in a number of wild birds in Great Britain this autumn. This includes the first reported wild bird mass mortality of the season associated with an HPAI finding.

The risk level of HPAI H5 in wild birds has increased from low to medium.

The risk level in poultry remains assessed as:

- low where there is suboptimal or poor biosecurity
- very low where good biosecurity is consistently applied at all times

While findings of HPAI in wild birds during recent years have been dominated by the H5N1 virus strain, the finding of HPAI H5N5 was likely this season and follows previous findings in Great Britain and recent detections of the strain in continental Europe.

Bird keepers - what you should do

If you have any kept birds, you must remain vigilant for signs of the disease.

Signs of low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI)

Typically, infection with LPAI is often difficult to detect, with very few if any clinical signs.

An infected flock might show signs of respiratory distress, diarrhoea, a loss of appetite or a drop in egg production of more than 5%.

If you are suspicious your flock has any form of avian influenza you must contact your local animal health office immediately.

Signs of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)

Typically this form of the disease presents suddenly, often with very high mortality, with affected birds developing swollen heads, a blue colouration of the comb and wattles, dullness, lack of appetite, respiratory distress, diarrhoea and significant drop in egg production.

However, there can be considerable variation in the clinical picture and severity of the disease. If you are suspicious your flock has any form of avian influenza you must contact your local animal health office immediately.

If you suspect signs of any notifiable diseases, you must report it immediately by contacting your local Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) [Field Services Office](#). Failure to do so is an offence. Sign up to the APHA [Alerts Service](#) to keep up to date with the latest news.

Practice Good biosecurity

Good biosecurity improves the overall health and productivity of your flock by helping keep out poultry diseases and limiting the spread of disease during an outbreak. For best practice guidance from the Scottish and Welsh Governments see: [Biosecurity and preventing disease in captive birds](#)

Keepers with over 500 birds

Keepers with more than 500 birds need to:

- restrict access for non-essential personnel on their sites
- ensure workers change clothing and footwear before entering bird enclosures
- clean and disinfect site vehicles regularly to limit the risk of disease spreading

Small flocks

Small flock owners with smaller numbers of poultry, including chickens, ducks and geese must also take steps to limit the risk of the disease spreading to their animals. This also applies if you only have a few birds as pets.

An outbreak of avian influenza in backyard poultry results in the same restrictions on movement of birds. It has the same impact on farmers and trade in poultry as an outbreak on a commercial farm would have.

Read [the small flock keepers guide to biosecurity](#) for more information.

Contingency Planning

Poultry businesses should ensure that their contingency plans are up to date. A contingency plan should include how you might manage if you are caught up in movement restrictions within a disease control zone as well as plans around how you might manage a disease outbreak on your own holding. Thinking about how you might manage officials and vehicles coming on to the farm, how you would store and dispose of litter, manage wastewater could all save a lot of time and help things run more smoothly should you be unfortunate enough to have to deal with disease controls. For guidance and a template to help you make a contingency plan see [contingency plans](#).