

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza, also known as “Bird Flu”, is a viral infection which affects many bird species, including chickens, ducks, turkeys, and geese. It enters the UK via migratory birds and can be spread by wild birds, other wildlife, and humans.

There are two forms of Avian Influenza (AI):

- Low Pathogenicity (LPAI): Symptoms are variable, including reduced egg production, respiratory symptoms, diarrhoea, and reduced food and water intake. Many common avian diseases also cause these symptoms.
- High Pathogenicity (HPAI): Symptoms are similar to LPAI but more severe and may include high levels of sudden mortality. Chickens and turkeys will often die soon after symptoms appear. In addition, the comb and wattle can appear blue in colour. Ducks and geese are less susceptible and may show signs similar to LPAI when infected with HPAI.

When should I call my vet?

- Most birds will try to hide symptoms, so it is important to spend time with them each day to spot any changes in behaviour. If you have any concerns about the health of your birds your vet can provide useful, reliable advice.
- Contact your vet immediately if a bird has any of the symptoms described above or dies suddenly with no prior evidence of disease.
- It is advised that you do not leave the site the birds are kept at, which may be your home, until you have contacted a vet to discuss the situation. If you leave the site, you may spread AI to other locations, for example on your clothes or vehicle.

How can I protect my birds?

Housing: The new housing measures, which will come into force on Monday 14th December 2020, mean that it will be a legal requirement for all bird keepers to keep their birds indoors and where this is not practical, ensure all runs are enclosed with netting to prevent contact with wild birds.

Cleaning: Clean footwear before and after visiting any birds to reduce the risk of spreading infection. Control rodents humanely and keep the site clean and tidy to reduce the risk of them returning.

Food & water: These attract wild birds. Provide them in a covered area and remove any spillage regularly.

Registration: Register your flock with the Animal and Plant Health Agency via the website below.

Resources

Please visit the APHA government Avian Influenza website for more information, including a Biosecurity Self-assessment Checklist and for flock registration: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu>

This resource was produced by the VetPartners Clinical Board Poultry Special Interest Group and the team at Poultry Health Services and finished on 10/12/2020.