



Avian Influenza: Frequently asked questions

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Q1: What is Avian Influenza?

A: Avian influenza (AI) is a highly contagious viral disease affecting the respiratory, digestive and/or nervous system of several species of domestic poultry, as well as pet birds and wild birds. It is caused by Type A Influenza Virus. Avian influenza is also known as “Bird Flu”.

Q2: What is meant by low pathogenic and highly pathogenic avian influenza?

A: There are many strains of AI viruses and these can be classified into two categories according to the severity of disease they produce in poultry: low pathogenic (LPAI) that typically causes little or no clinical signs in birds and highly pathogenic (HPAI) that can cause severe clinical signs and often high mortality rates in birds.

Q3: What are the signs of avian influenza infection in birds?

A: The main clinical signs of HPAI in birds are:

- Depression/lethargy
- loss of appetite and excessive thirst
- swollen head
- blue discolouration of combs, wattles, neck and throat
- respiratory distress such as gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling
- diarrhoea
- reduced/no eggs laid
- Sudden death.

Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) is usually less serious. It can cause mild breathing problems, depression and a reduction in egg production. However affected birds will not always show clear signs of infection.

Q4: How is avian influenza spread?

A: All avian influenza viruses can be transmitted among birds through direct contact with body fluids from infected birds such as droppings or through contaminated feed, water, equipment, and human clothing. The viruses can also be transmitted from place to place by the movement

of live birds, people (especially when shoes and other clothing are contaminated), and contaminated vehicles, equipment, feed, and cages.

Q5: Can avian influenza spread through the air?

A: No, AI is not an airborne disease. As outlined above direct contact with affected birds or contaminated materials is required in order to spread the disease among birds.

Q6: Can avian influenza spread from affected birds to people?

A: Some types of avian influenza can pass to people, but this is very rare. It usually requires very close contact between the person and infected birds.

Q7: I have been vaccinated for human flu as part of the Health Service Executive's Seasonal Flu Vaccination Campaign. Does this protect me from avian influenza?

A: No, the flu vaccination will only prevent you from contracting the strains of the human flu virus included in the human flu vaccine.

Q8: Are other animals such as farm animals or pets susceptible to avian influenza?

A: Avian influenza viruses have occasionally been isolated from mammalian species including rats, mice, weasels, ferrets, pigs, cats, tigers, dogs, horses. However it is very rare for mammals to be infected with avian influenza.

Q9: Can avian influenza be spread to humans through food?

A: There is no evidence that avian influenza can be transmitted to humans through the consumption of properly cooked food such as poultry meat and eggs.

Q10: Are wild birds at risk?

A: Migratory water fowl, in particular wild ducks, act as the natural reservoir of the avian influenza virus. Wild birds may carry the AI virus from one area to another through the process of migration and therefore they are an important risk factor to consider in the spread of avian influenza.

Q11: What do I do if I come across dead wild birds?

A: Members of the public are asked to report incidents where multiple wild birds (e.g. 3 or more of same species and 5 or more of multiple species) of species, other than common garden birds or pigeons, are found dead in the same location and at the same time to the DAFM Avian Influenza helpline (Tel: **0761064403**) or to your local Regional Veterinary Office the contact details for which can be found at: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/contact/>

Q12: Is there specific legislation to deal with the threat of avian influenza in Ireland?

Yes. A number of different pieces of legislation are in place at both European Union (EU) and national level in relation to avian influenza. The main legislation is Council Directive 2005/94/EC which sets out what each country in the EU is required to do in relation to the prevention and early detection of avian influenza. It sets out the minimum control measures to be applied in the event of an outbreak and requires each country to draw up a specific contingency plan setting out the national measures to be implemented in the event of an avian influenza outbreak. This European directive is implemented in Ireland by a specific piece of national legislation.

Q13: What would happen there is a suspected case of avian influenza in a poultry flock in Ireland?

DAFM has a detailed contingency plan and operations manual in place which sets out the actions to be taken in the event of avian influenza being suspected or indeed confirmed in an Irish poultry flock. The plan includes a wide range of specific measures to mitigate the risk of the disease spreading to other flocks and to protect the health of personnel working with the affected flock(s). This plan would be implemented in full in the event of avian influenza being suspected and/or confirmed in Ireland.

Q14: What would happen to poultry on a premises where avian influenza has been confirmed?

All poultry and captive birds on a premises where avian influenza has been confirmed would be humanely slaughtered in order to prevent the risk of the disease spreading to other birds. There is scope for the application of limited derogations, for example in the case of endangered species or rare breeds and the use of this derogation would be decided on a case by case basis based on expert knowledge and a risk analysis.

Q15: What restrictions if any would be put in place on the movement of birds and other animals in the event of an outbreak of avian influenza in Ireland?

A: DAFM would put in place what is known as a “Restricted Zone” in the area surrounding the infected premises. The size of this zone would depend on whether the flock involved was infected with LPAI or HPAI. A variety of disease control measures would be implemented inside the restricted zone including, amongst other things, a prohibition on the movement of poultry, animals and all other materials from poultry farms located in the zone. Further information on the actions that would be taken in the event of an outbreak of avian influenza outbreak are available at: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrols/avianinfluenzabirdflu/news/4621AvianInfluenza.pdf>

Q16: How long would the restriction zones remain in place?

Restrictions would remain in place for at least 30 days after the preliminary cleaning and disinfection of the infected premises.

Q17: I am a poultry farmer, how can I prevent avian influenza from entering my flock?

A: You can reduce the risk of disease entering your flock by following the biosecurity advice provided by DAFM to all poultry farmers in the following information leaflet: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrols/avianinfluenzabirdflu/poultryindustry/4670BioSecuritylr.pdf>. In addition you should monitor your flock closely for signs of disease and report any suspicion of disease promptly to your private veterinary practitioner and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). Contact details for DAFM offices are available at: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/contact/localoffices/>. Alternatively the DAFM avian influenza hotline can be contacted on **0761064403**.

Q18: I am a free range/backyard poultry farmer, when should I bring my birds indoors?

A: In the event that HPAI was confirmed in Ireland, all birds in premises located within 3km of the infected flock would be required, by law, to be kept indoors. In addition, if a risk assessment by DAFM determined that Ireland was at a high risk of introduction of HPAI, it may be required that all poultry are kept indoors. If you do not have housing for your birds, you will be expected to take steps to contain your birds and minimise contact between your birds and wild birds.

Q19: I am a poultry farmer, what do I do if I suspect AI in my flock?

A: It is a legal requirement to report a suspicion of AI to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). This can be done by contacting your local DAFM office during normal working hours at <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/contact/localoffices/> or by calling the avian influenza hotline on **076 1064403**. Having reported a suspicion on avian influenza you must not allow any birds, people, carcasses, or anything else to be moved off the premises until such time as a Veterinary Inspector from DAFM has visited your premises and carried out an examination of the birds.

Q20: What is the current situation with AI in Europe?

A: Cases of AI in poultry and wild birds do occur in Europe, particular during periods of inward migration of wild birds from other parts of the world. DAFM monitors the occurrence of AI across the world, with particular emphasis on EU trading partners, on an ongoing basis in order to assess the risk of AI introduction into Ireland. For example when a case of AI is confirmed in a European country DAFM will carry out a tracing exercise to determine whether live poultry or poultry products have been imported from that country during the specific risk period and if so, these are investigated to ensure any risks are minimised. Further detail on the current situation with AI worldwide can be obtained from the following websites:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/animal-diseases/control-measures/avian-influenza_en

http://www.oie.int/wahis_2/public/wahid.php/Diseaseinformation/Diseasedistributionmap