



## Avian Influenza Guidance for Hunters

### Introduction

Since the beginning of July 2022, there have been more than 60 confirmed cases of Avian Influenza H5N1 confirmed in wild birds in Ireland. Hunting associations and wildlife authorities should be aware that avian influenza virus might be present in waterfowl and other wild birds such as pheasants, as the virus is known to be circulating widely in wildbird populations.

HPAI is a disease of birds caused by a specific strain or type of influenza (the H5N1 strain). This strain spreads very easily among birds where it has a very high mortality. H5N1 can also infect people. The H5N1 strain is not easily passed on from birds to people or between people, and so far, the numbers of human cases of H5N1 seen around the world has been very low. Outside Europe, when people have been infected, HPAI has resulted in a high mortality rate. Although small numbers of people have been infected in Europe, fortunately, it has been caused by a milder version of the strain seen elsewhere. Nevertheless, it is very important that people do not handle sick, live wild birds or wild bird carcasses.

It is important to remember that hunters are potentially at risk of infection from certain strains of influenza viruses and other avian pathogens (e.g. *Salmonella* spp., *Chlamydia*). Furthermore, the hunting, handling and dressing of shot waterfowl carries the risk of spreading avian influenza viruses to susceptible **poultry**. Hunters should only gather birds which appear healthy prior to shooting. Do not handle sick or moribund wild birds. See DAFM's website for information on Avian Influenza.

Surveillance of wild waterfowl is an important function that hunters can perform to assist the Department of Agriculture in avian influenza controls.

There is no evidence that properly cooked waterfowl (or domestic poultry) can cause illness in people. The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HSE-HPSC) and the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) advise that the **risk to public health** from H5N1 avian influenza is very low and that the disease poses **no food safety risk** to consumers.

### Precautions to be followed

The following precautions are always recommended to reduce the risk of contracting or spreading any wildlife disease:

1. Never handle birds that appear sick or are found dead.
2. Assume that every animal that you come across (whether killed by you or not) is potentially infected with a communicable disease, and always follow the instructions below, in every instance.
3. Wear rubber gloves while cleaning game or cleaning bird feeders.
4. Never eat, drink or smoke while cleaning game.



5. Always wash hands with soap and water immediately after handling birds or other animals, when cooking or preparing animal products, and before eating. Alcohol wipes can be used to decontaminate hands, as long as there is no visible soiling of the hands (i.e. if the hands look clean). If the hands are visibly soiled (i.e. look dirty), soap and water must always be used.
6. Wash tools and work surfaces used to clean game birds, with soap and water, then disinfect with a 10 percent solution of chlorine bleach.
7. Ensure that any cooked game has been properly prepared. Eat only fully cooked meat. Meat is fully cooked when the temperature reaches 75°C at the core (i.e. in the thickest parts of the meat), and the juices are running clear.
8. Avoid introduction of avian influenza viruses to poultry through fomites (clothing, boots, vehicles, etc.).
9. Do not feed wild bird scraps to poultry or domestic animals (cats, dogs).
10. Any waste from hunted birds should be treated as potentially contaminated bagged and safely disposed of.
11. **Seek immediate advice from your doctor if you show signs of fever within 10 days of having contact with poultry, farmed birds, wild birds or other animals.**
12. If it is suspected that you have been exposed to avian influenza, your local Public Health Department will also be in contact to carry out a risk assessment and you may be advised to take an anti-viral medicine called oseltamivir (Tamiflu) which is used to prevent and treat influenza. Further advice on avian influenza in humans is available on the [Health Protection Surveillance Centre website](#).
13. Stay informed of H5N1 and other AI viruses that might be present in waterfowl during the hunting season.

### Reporting unusual sick or dead birds

1. Wild birds appearing to be sick, moribund or found dead **should never be handled**. Report any unusual sick or dead birds to the NARGC, [Regional Veterinary Office](#). Alternatively phone the Avian Influenza Hotline (01) 607 2512 or the National Disease Emergency Hotline on (01) 492 8026 outside normal office hours.
2. They can also be reported through the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Avian Check App (accessible all hours) <https://aviancheck.apps.services.agriculture.gov.ie/>
3. If it is unavoidably necessary to handle dead wild birds, it is essential to use disposable or rubber gloves and/or a plastic bag. Dispose of the gloves carefully or wash them in soap and hot water after use.



## Restrictions on shooting and release of game birds

1. Shooting and release of game birds may need to be restricted if they create a significant risk of disease spread through dispersal of birds, or presents a significant risk to human health.
2. European Legislation requires the release of game birds to be banned within 10km of a finding of a highly pathogenic avian influenza in poultry.

## Dogs, cats and avian influenza

1. Dogs are susceptible to canine influenza viruses but are not usually susceptible to avian influenza viruses.
2. Experimentally it has been shown that dogs can be infected, although it is extremely rare for this to happen.
3. Cats are known to be susceptible to avian influenza viruses. They need to be in contact with waterfowl, poultry, or uncooked poultry that are infected in order to contract the virus.

## Useful Links

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/50ce4-avian-influenza-bird-flu/#what-you-should-do-if-you-see-a-sick-or-dead-wild-bird>

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/influenza/avianinfluenza/>

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/50ce4-avian-influenza-bird-flu/>

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/zoonotic-influenza/facts/factsheet-h5n1>

[http://www.who.int/influenza/human\\_animal\\_interface/en/](http://www.who.int/influenza/human_animal_interface/en/)

[https://www.fsai.ie/faq/avian\\_influenza.html#:~:text=Avian%20influenza%20\(also%20called%20'bird,greater%20resistance%20to%20the%20disease](https://www.fsai.ie/faq/avian_influenza.html#:~:text=Avian%20influenza%20(also%20called%20'bird,greater%20resistance%20to%20the%20disease)