



# Frequently Asked Questions on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Wild Birds

## **What is Avian Influenza?**

Avian Influenza, or bird flu, is a contagious and often fatal viral disease of birds. Avian influenza can affect many different types of birds including domesticated birds such as chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese and other fowl.

There are two types of avian influenza which are named according to the impact that the disease has on birds:

- Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) can have up to 100% mortality in affected flocks
- Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza generally causes mild disease in affected birds

## **What type of avian influenza is currently circulating in Ireland at this time?**

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza subtype H5N1 (HPAI H5N1) is the strain known to be currently circulating in wild birds in Ireland. There have been reports of mass die-offs of breeding seabirds across Europe and the UK in recent months.

There have been unprecedentedly high numbers of reports of sick and dead birds, predominantly in coastal regions in recent weeks. The disease has now been confirmed to be widespread right around the Irish coast.

## **What should I do if I see a sick or dead wild bird?**

Do not approach sick or dead wild birds. Sick wild birds may bite when approached. Never bring sick or dead wild birds home, this is especially important if you own or work with poultry or other captive birds. Wild birds may be carrying several diseases, including avian influenza, which could spread to your own birds.

If you see a sick or dead wild bird, you can report it to the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

## **How should I report sick or dead wild birds?**

If you find dead or sick wild birds, you can report them during office hours through Avian Influenza Hotline (01) 607 2512. Alternatively, they can be reported via the Avian Check App (accessible all hours) <https://aviancheck.apps.services.agriculture.gov.ie/>

### **Will all birds be collected for avian influenza testing?**

The Department conducts surveillance on sick and dead wild birds to determine if avian influenza is circulating in an area. Once this has been confirmed, it is not necessary to continue sampling birds from the same area. The avian influenza virus is very contagious amongst birds and can survive for several weeks in the environment.

The faeces of infected birds contains a high level of virus and so the area can remain infective irrespective of whether bird carcasses are removed from an area or not.

### **What risks does this strain of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza present to my family or pets?**

The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HSE-HPSC) and the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) advise that the risk to public health from avian influenza subtype H5N1 is **very low** and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) has determined that the disease poses no food safety risk to consumers of well-cooked poultry products, including eggs.

However, as with all influenza A viruses, as there is potential for zoonotic spread (spread from animals to humans) it is wise to take appropriate precautions, by avoiding handling sick and dead wild birds suspected of being infected with avian influenza.

Always keep pets away from sick or dead wild birds. Dogs should be kept on a leash in areas when sick or dead wild birds are present, as they will often approach sick or dead wild birds out of curiosity.

### **Someone in my household has touched a sick/dead wild bird. What should we do now?**

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water. Any clothing, footwear or any other materials that have come into contact with the bird should be cleaned and disinfected.

Remain vigilant for flu like symptoms (cough, runny nose, sore throat, temperature, aches and pains) or diarrhoea. If the person develops any of these symptoms contact your doctor **immediately**. You should make them aware of the person's potential exposure to Bird flu.

### **I have a poultry flock at home. Are my birds at risk of becoming infected with Avian Influenza?**

Since we know that Avian Influenza virus is circulating in the wild bird population, there is a possibility that they can contaminate the environment through faeces. This can then be a potential source of infection for poultry and other captive birds.

Poultry owners should continue to maintain best practice biosecurity measures to prevent further outbreaks in poultry and captive birds as there remains an ongoing risk from HPAI H5N1 virus potentially circulating in the environment. Further advice on biosecurity can be found on [www.gov.ie/birdflu](http://www.gov.ie/birdflu)

Poultry owners and those working with poultry should beware of travelling to areas, both at home and abroad, where die-offs of wild birds have occurred. Biosecurity precautions must be taken before

coming into contact with poultry on their return, i.e. clothing and footwear worn in areas should not be brought into contact with poultry without prior cleaning and disinfection.

Flock owners should remain vigilant for any signs of disease in their flocks and report any suspicion of the disease to their local Regional Veterinary Office.

**There are dead birds on my local beach, who is responsible for collecting them?**

Where dead birds are present on publicly owned lands, it is the responsibility of the Local Authority to collect and dispose of those birds.

**National Disease Control Centre**