

Briefing Note No. 22-22 Avian Influenza update November 2022

Service: Public Protection
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Introduction

Following a UK-wide increase in the number of detections of Avian Influenza (bird flu) in wild birds and on commercial premises, last week the Chief Veterinary Officers from England, Scotland and Wales declared an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) across Great Britain to mitigate the risk of the disease spreading amongst poultry and captive birds.

It is likely that cases will become more common in the UK and the county so we thought it would be useful to share information with you, should you receive any enquiries from your local communities.

Background

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is a highly infectious viral disease affecting the respiratory, digestive and / or nervous system of many species of birds.

Avian Influenza is not airborne. It is spread by movement of infected birds or contact with respiratory secretions and in particular faeces, either directly or through contaminated objects, clothes and vehicles.

The severity of disease depends upon the strain of the virus and the type of bird infected. Some strains known as 'Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza' (HPAI) viruses have the potential to cause severe disease in poultry, associated with a high death rate (up to 100%). The disease can develop so rapidly that birds may die without showing any previous signs of disease.

Prevention and control of HPAI is critical to the health and welfare of animals, the economy and international trade.

Humans and other animals can be infected through close contact with live infected birds. The cases of this occurring are extremely limited and the risk to human health is normally negligible. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has said that Avian Influenza is primarily a disease of birds and the risk to the general public's health is very low.

The Food Standards Agency has said that on the basis of the current scientific evidence, Avian Influenza poses a very low food safety risk for UK consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

Avian Influenza is unconnected with COVID-19.

It is now a legal requirement for all bird keepers in Great Britain to follow strict biosecurity measures to help protect their flocks from the threat of Avian Influenza

We are reminding bird keepers, whether they have pets or commercial flocks, to keep a close watch on their birds for signs of disease, maintain good biosecurity and follow the latest guidance. People should not touch or pick up any dead or visibly sick wild birds that they find. They should call the DEFRA helpline on 03459 33 55 77 if they find:

- One or more dead bird of prey or owl
- Three or more dead gulls or wild waterfowl (swans, geese and ducks)
- Five or more dead birds of any species

If they are not needed for Avian Influenza surveillance purposes, there is [advice for members of the public](#) to follow for the disposal of dead garden birds.

If anyone suspects any type of Avian Influenza in poultry or captive birds they must report it immediately by calling the DEFRA Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301.

Latest situation

Mandatory housing measures for all poultry and captive birds are to be introduced to all areas of England from 00:01 on Monday 7 November 2022, following a decision by the United Kingdom's Chief Veterinary Officer.

The housing measures legally require all bird keepers to keep their birds indoors and to follow stringent biosecurity measures to help protect their flocks from the disease, regardless of type or size.

The order will extend the mandatory housing measures already in force in the hot spot area of Suffolk, Norfolk and parts of Essex to the whole of England following an increase in the national risk of bird flu in wild birds to very high.

Over the last year, the United Kingdom has faced its largest ever outbreak of Avian Influenza with over 200 cases confirmed since late October 2021. The introduction of the housing measures comes after the disease was detected at over 70 premises since the beginning of October, as well as multiple reports in wild birds.

More information about the housing order can be found at [Avian influenza: Housing order to be introduced across England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

In addition to the AIPZ, which is already in force, this means all bird keepers across England must:

- house or net all poultry and captive birds
- cleanse and disinfect clothing, footwear, equipment and vehicles before and after contact with poultry and captive birds – if practical, use disposable protective clothing
- reduce the movement of people, vehicles or equipment to and from areas where poultry and captive birds are kept, to minimise contamination from manure, slurry and other products, and use effective vermin control

- keep records of mortality, movement of poultry and poultry products and any changes in production
- thoroughly cleanse and disinfect housing on a continuous basis
- keep fresh disinfectant at the right concentration at all farm and poultry housing entry and exit points
- minimise direct and indirect contact between poultry and captive birds and wild birds, including making sure all feed and water is not accessible to wild birds
- prevent access by poultry to ponds and watercourses and ensure that birds are kept in fenced or enclosed areas

There is currently a case of Avian Influenza among captive birds at a premises in Amesbury. When cases like this are confirmed a 3km captive bird-controlled zone is set up which helps to mitigate any ongoing transmission (more information can be found below in the 'Local Authority Role' section).

The Government regularly updates its dedicated webpage, which includes details of the latest confirmed cases across the country. The webpage can be found at [Avian influenza \(bird flu\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk).

The Wiltshire Council website also has some information about Avian Influenza. It can be found at [Livestock health and welfare - Wiltshire Council](#).

Local authority role

On confirmation of a case the local authority (lead by the Animal and Plant Health Agency) assists in the disease control response. This is primarily done by foot patrols where staff target all premises within 3km of an infected premises to locate all captive birds kept. This is to ensure APHA is aware of all bird keepers so they can conduct inspections to check for signs of disease.

Other responses include:

- Promote and encourage poultry keepers to comply with the Prevention Zone Measures (via our external communications channels) and other guidance in place
- Active enforcement in the event of non-compliance i.e., keepers refusing to house birds
- Carcass disposal – Where dead birds are on public land it is the local authority's responsibility to safely dispose of the carcasses as animal by-products where it is warranted
- Placement of road signage indicating the beginning/end of a disease zone
- Closure of footpaths or rights of way if necessary (indicated by APHA)

We will keep you updated should there be any significant updates. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email animalhealth@wiltshire.gov.uk