



Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

What should you know?

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza (AI), commonly known as Bird Flu, is a disease carried naturally by wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect poultry and other bird and animal species.



There are many subtypes of AI viruses that can be classified into low and high pathogenicity forms based on the severity of the illness they cause in chickens. Most fall under low pathogenicity AI (LPAI) and typically cause little or no clinical signs in poultry. In contrast, high pathogenicity AI (HPAI) causes a severe and extremely contagious disease of poultry. While LPAI is considered a lower risk, they have the capacity to mutate into HPAI.

How is the disease spread?

Migratory waterfowl are carriers of recent AI virus strains that have infected poultry. Influenza primarily spreads by contact between infected and healthy birds, through contact with contaminated equipment and materials, or by people carrying the virus on their shoes, clothes, and/or hands.

The virus is present in feces and in secretions from the nose, mouth, and eyes of infected birds. Contact with infected fecal material is the most common method of bird-to-bird transmission. The AI virus can also spread in the air between birds in a poultry house, moved between poultry properties on contaminated objects or clothing, and on unwashed eggs.

What are the clinical signs of AI in birds?

- **Low Pathogenic AI Signs** - Nasal or eye discharge, swelling below the eyes, drop in egg production/quality, diarrhea, and decreased appetite/water intake.
- **Highly Pathogenic AI Signs** - Difficulty breathing, neurological signs (twisted neck, circling, stumbling), bruising, bluish/swollen combs or wattles, swollen eyes/head, diarrhea, and sudden death with mortality rates that can approach 100% in a flock. When poultry are infected with HPAI, they may die before they show any symptoms.

If your birds were exposed or show signs of AI, notify your local veterinarian, the Sick Bird Hotline, your local California Department of Food & Agriculture (CDFA) District Office, or the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Veterinary Services immediately.

What happens if your birds are tested and confirmed positive for AI?

If birds are confirmed positive with an H5 or H7 avian influenza subtype, CDFA and USDA personnel will work with you to remove the disease.

Is there an AI vaccine available in California?

The USDA has not approved the use of avian influenza vaccines in the United States. Prevention is the best way to protect against avian influenza. Poultry producers and backyard flock owners should maintain consistent biosecurity practices year-round.

Does AI affect pet birds (e.g. parrots, parakeets)?

Pet birds are susceptible to avian influenza. Pet birds are at a much lower risk when kept indoors compared to being housed in outside aviaries, where they are exposed to wild birds thus, more susceptible to AI viruses.

Does AI threaten human health?

Some strains of AI viruses can infect people having close, direct contact with infected birds. The potential for the virus to mutate into a form that spreads from person-to-person is a serious public health concern.



Ongoing surveillance and mandatory inspections prevent diseased poultry and eggs from entering the food chain. Proper handling and cooking of poultry and eggs also protects people against the virus.

Avian influenza infections in US wild birds and poultry pose a low risk to the public.

CDFA Animal Health Branch

Headquarters - (916) 900-5002

Redding District - (530) 225-2140

Modesto District - (209) 491-9350

Tulare District - (559) 685-3500

Ontario District - (909) 947-5932

USDA-APHIS-VS (916) 854-3950 or (877) 741-3690

For more information, please visit:

www.cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/animal_health

[Avian Health Program](#)

[Avian Influenza Web Page](#)



To report an unusual number of sick or dead birds, call:

Sick Bird Hotline
(866) 922-2473