



Avian influenza (bird flu) and domestic birds

High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) – also known as bird flu – is a viral disease that is affecting domestic and wild birds around the world. New Zealand has never had a case of HPAI, but it's important to be aware of HPAI if you keep poultry or waterfowl.

About HPAI

HPAI is affecting birds and mammals in a number of countries worldwide. HPAI viruses cause high mortality in poultry (chickens, turkeys and quail), and waterfowl (ducks, geese and swans). If HPAI arrived here, these would likely be the most affected domestic species.

New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific are currently free of HPAI, although it has been detected in birds on the Antarctic peninsula. As information emerges about the distribution of the disease in Antarctica, there will be a better understanding about the likelihood of HPAI reaching New Zealand through wild bird movements.

Once in New Zealand, it could spread by direct contact between infected and healthy birds, or through contaminated equipment and materials, including water and feed.

If HPAI arrives here, cooked food will still be safe to eat. There is no evidence that eggs or chicken meat, or foods that contain them, are unsafe to eat if they are properly cooked.



How to protect your birds from HPAI

You can reduce your birds' exposure to viruses from wild birds by practising good biosecurity.

- Don't allow wild birds to access to your birds' food or water.
- Prevent contact between domestic and wild birds with fencing or netting.
- Regularly clean bird housing and equipment, and don't share equipment with other bird owners.
- Quarantine new poultry and birds for 2 weeks before introducing them to your current birds. Look for any signs of disease appearing during this time.
- Always thoroughly wash your hands with soap before and after handling birds.
- Clean your footwear and wash clothing regularly. Avoid using the same clothing and footwear around your own birds if you have visited other flocks or events such as shows.
- Follow general good health guidelines for your birds as advised by your veterinarian.

HPAI is a notifiable disease, which means there is a legal obligation to report suspected outbreaks.

What to look for in your birds

The most obvious sign of HPAI is sudden death in several birds. Other signs in poultry can include:

- lethargy/reluctance to move
- reduced appetite
- droopy head
- darkened and/or swollen comb/wattle
- panting and nasal secretions
- unusual drop in egg production
- bleeding disorders
- a silent poultry shed.

In waterfowl, the signs are similar but can be less severe and slower to progress:

- weak neck and lack of coordination
- blindness
- trembling.

Food safety

HPAI is sensitive to heat treatment, meaning that cooked food is safe to eat.

There is no evidence that eggs or chicken meat, or foods that contain them, are routes of infection of humans for avian influenza, provided they are properly cooked.

If you suspect HPAI in your own birds

Avian influenza can only be diagnosed and confirmed through laboratory testing. If several of your birds die suddenly or show signs of HPAI, please contact your veterinarian first to rule out more common avian diseases.

Wait for your veterinarian's instructions before handling any sick or dead birds.



If you suspect HPAI in wild birds

If you see three or more sick or dead wild birds in a group, report it immediately to Biosecurity New Zealand's Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline on 0800 80 99 66. Do not handle the birds.

Provide as much detail to Biosecurity New Zealand as you can, including:

- a GPS reading or other precise location information
- photographs and/or videos of sick and dead birds
- species identity and estimate of numbers affected
- note how many are sick or freshly dead, and the total number present.

Biosecurity New Zealand will take details and an incursion investigator will be in contact with you.

Follow any instructions from Biosecurity New Zealand for handling of sick or dead birds.

