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Avian Influenza in Birds

Information from the US and Oregon Departments of Agriculture, 2024

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian influenza is a respiratory disease of birds caused by influenza type A viruses. These viruses are common in wild birds in the United States and around the world. In most cases, they cause few or no signs of infection. However, some “highly pathogenic” subtypes, like H5N1, can cause severe illness and death in susceptible species like chickens, turkeys, parrots and raptors. The H5N1 subtype of avian influenza virus has been found this year in wild birds, commercial poultry farms and backyard chicken flocks across the US, and it has even been found in cattle.

How does Highly-Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) spread?

HPAI spreads quickly through direct, bird-to-bird contact. It can also be transmitted via contaminated surfaces, such as clothing, shoes, and vehicles (including their tires). Wild birds can spread the virus to new areas through their feces.

What are the signs of HPAI? How is it treated?

The most common signs (symptoms) of HPAI include decreased food and water consumption, lethargy, difficulty breathing, nasal discharge, purple discoloration or swelling around the legs and head, decreased egg production, diarrhea, or sudden death. ****There is no treatment that is effective against HPAI and there is no vaccine for it.****

What can be done to prevent owned birds from “catching” highly pathogenic avian influenza, then?

Good biosecurity is the key to keeping your birds safe. USDA urges bird owners to do the following:

- Keep wild birds and rodents out of bird houses and coops, and away from backyard flocks and pet birds.
- Secure feed bins and water bowls in closed areas, to avoid attracting wild birds and rodents.
- Consider removing bird feeders to avoid attracting wild birds.
- Keep visitors away from your birds. Avoid visiting other poultry farms or other people’s birds.
- Wash hands and shoes/boots before and after entering a bird area. Wear disposable boot covers and coveralls if you can, and discard them when leaving a bird area. If you have been in an area where wild waterfowl have been, change your clothes and shoes before handling poultry or parrots.
- For birds that are new to your flock, or those that have been to a bird show, isolate them in a quarantine area for at least 30 days before introducing them back to your flock.

If you see sick or dying birds, especially chickens, turkeys, parrots or raptors, consider reporting them to the USDA at 1-866-536-7593.

For more information, check out the following websites:

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/defend-the-flock>

<https://www.oregon.gov/oda/programs/animalhealthfeedslivestockid/animaldiseases/pages/avianinfluenza.aspx>