

# AVIAN INFLUENZA

## What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza, or bird flu, is a highly contagious viral infection that can affect all species of birds.

## Not all avian influenza viruses cause disease

There are many strains of avian influenza viruses naturally present in many species of wild birds, especially water fowl (ducks and geese). Most are harmless and do not cause disease in humans or birds.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is a severe form of the disease that spreads quickly, causing sudden death in poultry. The H5N1 (Asian strain) avian influenza virus, commonly referred to as 'bird flu' is HPAI.

## How does it spread to humans?

Generally, humans are not affected by avian influenza; however the H5N1 strain of the virus can infect humans who come in close contact with infected birds. Transmission usually occurs through handling infected birds or close contact with their excretions.



## Can the virus spread between humans?

There is no evidence of avian influenza being readily transmitted from one person to another. Adaptation to humans and evidence of sustained person to person spread would indicate a potential human pandemic. To date, this has not happened.

## Are New Zealanders at risk through food?

People are not infected through eating properly cooked poultry or eggs. Rather, human cases are generally a result of direct contact with infected birds or the consumption of raw poultry meat or blood.

The poultry and table egg products purchased in New Zealand supermarkets are all New Zealand produced and free from avian influenza. Good hand washing after contact with raw products should always be practiced.

## How could avian influenza enter New Zealand?

Potential routes of entry include illegal imports of poultry and unprocessed poultry products or the movement of contaminated fomites (viable virus in avian faecal material on packaging, clothing, equipment etc and other commodities from infected areas).

There has never been an outbreak of HPAI in New Zealand. Strict biosecurity measures, stringent testing regimes for avian influenza and other exotic diseases, and New Zealand's major poultry disease-free status proves that this system is highly effective.

## What is MAF doing about avian influenza?

Avian influenza is classed under the Biosecurity Act as a notifiable exotic disease in New Zealand. This means that any suspect cases must be notified to MAF immediately.

MAF has increased avian influenza surveillance, response planning and preparedness activities. In the event of an outbreak in New Zealand, MAF would activate its comprehensive response policies and operational plans.

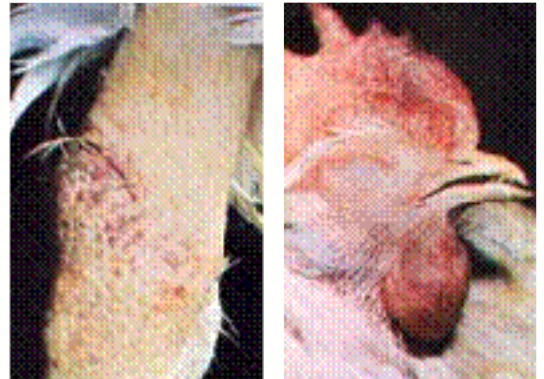
## I keep birds - what should I look out for?

A number of species can contract the disease, including ducks, chickens, geese, quail, turkeys, pheasants and many wild bird species.

The signs of bird flu can vary and depend on many factors, including the virulence of the disease and the species and age of the bird. Sudden death in birds is the most obvious sign.

The most common symptoms to look out for include:

- sudden and unexplained deaths;
- rapid spread of disease throughout the flock;
- depression and loss of appetite;
- a drop in egg production;
- nervous signs such as unusual head or neck posture, and convulsions;
- swelling and blue combs and wattles;
- coughing, sneezing and diarrhoea.



## What should I do if I suspect my birds have avian influenza?

It is important to involve your veterinarian if you ever have a health problem with any of your birds. If several birds display unusual disease symptoms, abnormal behaviour or unexpected deaths, report it immediately to the emergency pests and disease hotline on **0800 80 99 66**.

## Where can I get more information?

For up-to-date New Zealand pandemic information, visit: <http://www.moh.govt.nz/pandemicinfluenza>

For international information visit the World Health Organisation at: [www.who.int/csr/don](http://www.who.int/csr/don)

For information on countries where birds are affected, you can visit: [http://www.oie.int/download/AVIAN%20INFLUENZA/A\\_AI-Asia.htm](http://www.oie.int/download/AVIAN%20INFLUENZA/A_AI-Asia.htm)

<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/pest-and-disease-response/pests-and-diseases-watchlist/bird-flu>

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.BIOSECURITY.GOV.T.NZ**