

# Animal health update: Avian influenza — commercial poultry

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**August 18, 2022**

## Overview

There is an increased risk of Avian Influenza (AI) infection to poultry flocks during autumn wild bird migrations. Measures taken at this time to improve on-farm biosecurity, including avoiding contact with wild birds, may reduce the likelihood of exposure to your flock.

Avian influenza is not a threat to food safety. Ontario poultry and eggs are safe to eat when, as always, proper cooking along with safe and sanitary handling takes places. The risk of transmission to humans is very low. People working with poultry should take additional precautions and are strongly encouraged to follow all public health guidelines and maintain strict biosecurity. If you are concerned about your health or if you develop influenza-like symptoms after working with sick birds, please contact your health care provider.

## Current situation

Outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) continue to be reported in commercial poultry flocks in Canada with most recent detection on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 in a

domestic flock in Quebec. To date, nine provinces have reported cases of HPAI in domestic poultry.

The Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative (CWHC) continues to detect positive HPAI virus in wild birds across the country. As of August 11, 2022, CWHC has reported 1037 HPAI-positive detections in wild birds in Canada. Between March 10 and August 11, 2022, HPAI was detected in a total of 96 birds in Ontario, including:

- Turkey vulture
- Snowy and Great Horned owl
- American white pelican
- Ring-billed gull
- Canada goose
- Wood duck
- Bald eagle
- Red-tailed hawk
- Common raven
- American crow

Persistence of the HPAI virus, mainly the H5N1 serotype, indicates that the infection may have widely spread in wild birds. This means that the health risk from this HPAI virus family is now a year-round threat to domestic poultry and wildlife.

## Clinical signs

AI can infect both domesticated and wild birds, including chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quails, ducks, geese and guinea fowl. AI viruses are either **high or low pathogenic viruses** (HPAI and LPAI, respectively) depending on the molecular characteristic of the virus and its ability to cause disease and mortality in chickens.

Poultry infected with LPAI viruses may show mild signs of the disease or no signs of infection at all. Infections caused by HPAI can cause death. Both HPAI and LPAI can spread quickly through flocks. Moreover, LPAI viruses can mutate into highly pathogenic strains, which is why it is important that outbreaks are managed promptly. Birds become infected when they have direct contact with discharges from the eyes or nostrils, with feces from infected birds or from contact with contaminated surfaces, food or water supply.

All poultry farmers should monitor for mortalities and track flock feed and water consumption. Watch for any clinical signs of disease, such as:

- depression
- decreased feed consumption
- drop in egg production
- swollen wattles

- sneezing
- gasping
- ocular or nasal discharge
- diarrhea
- sudden death

## Biosecurity

AI can be brought into a barn by breaches in biosecurity, and it is most often transmitted from one infected commercial flock to another by movement of infected birds or contaminated equipment or clothing/footwear on people.

## Prevention

**If you have any concerns regarding the health status of your flock, contact your veterinarian immediately.** A list of Poultry Veterinarians can be searched on [College of Veterinarians of Ontario's website](#).

## Reducing risk of infection

Key steps to reduce the risk of infection in your flock include the following:

- Ensure adequate training of farm and company personnel in biosecurity and disease prevention.
- Require all people entering poultry barns, including farmers, employees and service providers to put on clean footwear and protective clothing and to follow all biosecurity protocols each time a barn is entered.
- Minimize visits to other poultry production sites and **avoid any commingling of birds or contact with outside/wild birds.**
- Avoid exchanging and sharing equipment with other poultry production sites or farms.
- Ensure all vehicles and farm equipment that access the barn vicinity are properly washed, disinfected and thoroughly dried before use.
- Ensure that laneways are restricted and secured.
- Prevent wild bird and rodent entry to poultry barns and related facilities.
- Ensure that bedding is free of contaminants (such as feces from wild animals).
- If possible, “heat treat” the barn/litter ahead of chick or poult placement (to 38°C for at least 4 days).

## Preparing for a potential outbreak

Key steps to prepare for a potential outbreak in your flock include the following:

- Poultry producers are responsible for the safety and security of their flock and their employees and preparedness is paramount.
- Ensure there is adequate supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for employees.
- Have a written emergency response ready to be accessed if needed.
- Familiarize yourself with procedures for dealing with specific situations (depopulation, disposal, cleaning and disinfection) so that time and resources are used most effectively if an outbreak is declared.
- Prepare a detailed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that applies to your poultry flock for response planning and implementation.

## **Additional information**

### **OMAFRA**

[Avian Influenza](#)

[Biosecurity](#)

### **CFIA**

[Avian influenza \(bird flu\) - Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#)

[Avian Biosecurity – Protect Poultry, Prevent Disease - Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#)

[Cleaning and disinfection process for premises declared infected with highly pathogenic avian influenza \(HPAI\) - Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#)

[National Avian Influenza - Wild Positives](#)

### **Ministry of Health**

[Avian Influenza - Emergency Planning and Preparedness - Programs and Services - Health Care Professionals - MOH](#)

### **United States Department of Agriculture**

[2022 Confirmations of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Commercial and Backyard Flocks](#)

### **Poultry Industry Council**

[Emergency Planning — Poultry Industry Council](#)