

# Avian Influenza



## What is avian influenza (bird flu)?

Avian influenza is a contagious disease caused by the type A influenza virus. In poultry, there are two forms of the disease. There is a “low pathogenic” (low virulence) form that causes mild symptoms and may even be undetected, and there is a “high pathogenic” (high virulence) form that spreads rapidly and kills many birds.

## What are the hosts for avian influenza?

All avian species may be susceptible to avian influenza, but waterfowl are the reservoir for the influenza A virus. Waterfowl can carry the virus without showing signs of sickness. Also, migratory birds may spread avian influenza, but their role in the spread of the virus is not completely understood.

## How is avian influenza transmitted from bird to bird?

Avian influenza is transmitted from bird to bird through direct contact with nasal and respiratory secretions, saliva and feces from infected birds.

## What are the signs of avian influenza in birds?

The signs of avian influenza can vary. Birds with avian influenza may exhibit some of the following signs: decreased feed intake, reduced egg production, ruffled feathers, swollen heads, coughing, sneezing, diarrhea, depression and death.

## How is avian influenza transmitted to humans?

Avian influenza does not usually infect humans. The virus does not spread easily from birds to humans, but human cases can occur. Avian influenza may be transferred from birds to people by direct contact with infected birds, contact with environments contaminated with feces or through an intermediate host (such as a pig).

## What are the signs of avian influenza in humans?

The symptoms of avian influenza in humans can vary, depending on the type of virus causing the infection. The symptoms can be typical flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or muscle aches. Other symptoms are eye infections, pneumonia or respiratory diseases.

## What will happen if my birds are infected with avian influenza?

There is no treatment for avian influenza. Therefore, control and eradication must take place when an outbreak occurs. Infected flocks will be quarantined and killed. The carcasses and animal products will be disposed of, and the facilities will be cleaned and disinfected. Facilities will remain empty for at least 21 days before repopulating. Also, surveillance around affected flocks will be conducted.

## How can I prevent avian influenza from infecting my flock?

Many virus subtypes can affect poultry. There is no way to predict which type will infect a flock, so vaccines are usually not practical. Prevention must occur through biosecurity practices. These practices include: preventing contact between poultry and wild birds, their feces and their respiratory secretions; avoiding the introduction of birds of unknown disease status into the flock; proper cleaning and disinfection of facilities; controlling human traffic; and allowing only one age group of birds per farm.

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