



**BIRD
FLU**

BE READY

BIRD FLU AND PROTECTING YOUR BIRDS

**KNOW WHAT TO DO TO BE READY
FOR BIRD FLU**



Bird flu is a highly contagious viral disease that affects wild and domestic birds/poultry. If you own birds, you can help keep them safe from diseases like bird flu by implementing good biosecurity practices.

Being ready now will give you the best chance of protecting your birds from bird flu.

About bird flu

High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) – more commonly known as bird flu – is a viral disease of birds. It can make birds very sick, and often causes death.

There are many different strains of bird flu but in 2020, a new strain of HPAI H5N1, clade 2.3.4.4b, emerged in the northern hemisphere and began to spread. This new strain has caused the deaths of millions of birds overseas, affecting wild birds as well as domesticated birds such as poultry and birds kept as pets. In rare cases, people and other mammals have also become infected with bird flu.

The new H5N1 strain can infect a much broader range of birds and spread across a larger geographical range than previous strains have. This means it could spread to New Zealand with migrating wild birds and, once here, spread through bird movements to other parts of the country.

In December 2024 the H7N6 strain was detected on a single poultry farm in Otago. This strain of the virus does not spread through the movement of wild birds as the H5N1 strain does.

If the H5N1 strain of bird flu arrives in New Zealand, backyard chickens, ducks, turkeys and other poultry, pet birds and commercially farmed birds could catch bird flu from infected wild birds. Free-range birds and birds with access to the outdoors will be at greater risk because they are more likely to come into contact with infected wild birds.

How bird flu spreads

Bird flu spreads quickly by direct, bird to-bird contact as well as indirectly through bird contact with feed, water, clothing, equipment, materials and surfaces that have been contaminated with the virus.

Infected birds shed the virus in their saliva, nasal secretions and faeces (droppings). Droppings from a single bird can contain enough virus to infect thousands of birds.

Bird flu is very infectious – once one bird in a flock is infected, it can spread through the flock within days.



Signs in birds

Detecting bird flu early is important to limit its spread. Unfortunately, one of the first signs of bird flu is sudden, unexplained death in several birds.

If you see signs of bird flu in multiple birds in your flock, consult your veterinarian first to rule out more common diseases. Wait for your veterinarian's instructions before handling any sick or dead birds.

Chickens and other poultry

- lack of energy/reluctance to move
- eating less than normal
- droopy head
- darkened and/or swollen comb/wattle
- coughing, panting and runny nostrils
- swelling around the head and neck
- laying fewer eggs than normal
- watery or green diarrhoea
- bruises on body and legs
- a silent hen house.

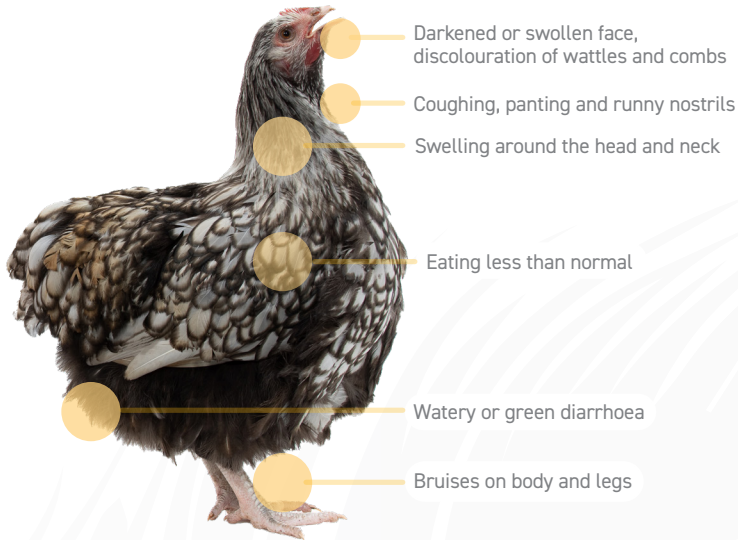


Chicken with darkened and markedly swollen comb and wattles.



Swollen and extensively reddened (bruised) chicken legs.

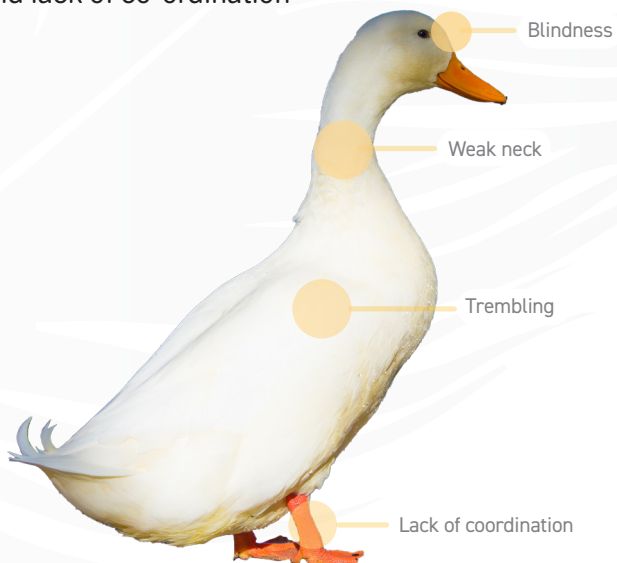
Photo Credits: Dr. D. Swayne, USDA, Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University, College of Veterinary Medicine



Water birds (e.g. ducks)

The signs are similar to chickens but can be less severe and take longer to appear:

- weak neck and lack of co-ordination
- blindness
- trembling.



How to protect your birds

The best way to keep your birds safe is to prevent them having contact with infected birds or contaminated materials and environments.



Keep your birds away from wild and sick birds

- Make enclosures bird proof by repairing or blocking holes
- Keep your birds away from open ponds, lakes, creeks or other water used by wild birds.
- Keep new birds in a separate area away from other birds (quarantine) for 14 days. Ensure they are healthy before introducing to your flock.
- Keep pet birds such as budgies, cockatiels, parrots, finches and doves inside, or under cover and separate from wild birds.

Maintain good hygiene

- Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling birds.
- Keep bird housing, bedding and equipment clean.
- Don't share equipment with other bird owners – including egg cartons and other storage materials.
- Clean your footwear and wash clothing regularly. Avoid using the same clothing and footwear around your birds if you have visited other flocks or events such as shows.
- Use pest control to control rats and mice, which can carry diseases on their feet and fur.

Keep feed and water bird flu-free

- Use fencing or netting to keep wild birds away from your bird's feed and water.
- Buy birds, litter and feed from accredited sources.

- Make sure the water you use doesn't come from sources that wild birds frequent or could contaminate. Treated (chlorinated) mains water and bore water that has been tested are less likely to be contaminated.

Other things you can do to protect your flock

- Avoid visiting any ponds or streams, especially with pets.
- Consider reducing large puddles and standing water on your property that may attract wild birds.
- Avoid letting other people handle your birds. If someone else must handle or visit your birds, they should wash their hands and wear clean clothes and footwear.
- If you can, keep different species of poultry and poultry of different age groups separated. These traits can make poultry more susceptible to disease.

Attending bird shows

If you attend bird shows, agricultural shows or other events where birds are present, maintain good hygiene. Additional steps you can take include:

- Do not take any birds to a show if there are signs of illness in your flock.
- All bird equipment and permanent carrying containers should be cleaned and disinfected before and after a show.
- At the show, avoid handling birds other than your own, if possible.
- When returning home, show birds should be kept separate (quarantined) from your other birds for 14 days before being reintroduced to the home flock.
- Keep a register of all bird movements on and off your property.

Protecting yourself and other animals

Since 2020, more than 60 mammal species have become infected with the H5N1 strain, generally after eating infected wild birds or being in very close proximity with them. Some species experience mild symptoms and recover with supportive care, but for other species, it can be deadly.

If you see anything of concern in your animals or anything else out of the ordinary, contact your veterinarian.

Avian influenza viruses are zoonotic, which means the viruses may occasionally infect humans through direct or indirect contact.

Use good hygiene

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling birds.
- Do not touch sick or dead birds.

Chicken and eggs remain safe to eat

There is no evidence that people can be infected with bird flu by eating thoroughly cooked eggs or poultry (like chicken, turkey, or duck), or foods that contain them.

Eggs should be cooked until the white is completely firm, and the yolk begins to thicken.

Chicken needs to be cooked to an internal temperature of:

- 75°C for at least 30 seconds, or
- 70°C for 3 minutes, or
- 65°C for 15 minutes.

More information

To learn more about bird flu and how to protect your animals go to mpi.govt.nz/bird-flu