



Maryland Department of Agriculture

Agriculture | Maryland's Leading Industry

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ANIMAL HEALTH ALERT – POULTRY OWNERS: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in the United States

ANNAPOLIS (April 23, 2015) – The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) State Veterinarian's Office urges poultry owners to be diligent with biosecurity and on alert for signs of illness in birds after receiving reports of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in commercial and backyard flocks from the midwest and Pacific United States. To report sick or dead birds, call MDA Animal Health at 410-481-5810. Fees for testing and necropsy may be waived for flocks with illness and/or high mortality.

There are no immediate public health concerns due to the current cases, and avian influenza does not affect poultry meat or egg products, which remain safe to eat. Maryland's commercial poultry industry has a strong and active avian influenza surveillance program, and works in close contact with the Maryland Department of Agriculture, the University of Maryland and other partners.

Avian influenza spreads bird-to-bird through saliva, feces, and other bodily fluids. Since many species of wild waterfowl can carry and shed influenza virus in feces without showing any signs of illness, it is extremely important to make a strong effort to keep domestic birds separated from wild waterfowl and to keep domestic birds off of waterways where wild waterbirds live.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture urges all bird or poultry owners to be on guard and to implement basic biosecurity steps to keep their flocks healthy and safe. The following are some important things poultry owners can do:

- Practice enhanced biosecurity - footbaths, isolation of new birds, curtail visits to auctions, live bird markets, swap meets, etc., until the risk of disease has passed.
- Have dedicated shoes (and clothes if possible) that you use only on the farm.
- Report any sick birds or unusual bird deaths to the Maryland Department of Agriculture Animal Health Program at 410-841-5810. To report groups of dead or sick waterfowl, shorebirds or gulls, contact the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Section at 1-877-463-6497.
- Prevent contact between your birds and wild birds. This may mean keeping birds housed indoors until the spring waterfowl migration is over (in about 6-8 weeks).
- Avoid contact with sick/dead poultry or wildlife. If contact does occur, wash your hands with soap and water and change clothing before having contact with healthy domestic poultry and birds.
- To learn more about Avian Influenza and its prevention, take the free certificate online course at <http://campus.extension.org/login/index.php>.

For more information on backyard bird flock biosecurity, visit <http://healthybirds.aphis.usda.gov/>.