

~Avian Influenza: Frequently Asked Questions~

What is Avian Influenza (AI)?

Avian Influenza (AI) is a highly contagious viral infection caused by the influenza virus type "A" which can affect several species of birds (chickens, turkeys, quails, guinea fowl, etc.) as well as pet and wild birds. AI is a flu that affects birds, just as there is a flu for humans and, as with people, some forms of the flu are worse than others. AI viruses are classified by a combination of two groups of proteins: hemagglutinin or H proteins (H1-H16) and neuraminidase or N proteins (N1-N9). AI viruses are also broken into two groups based on the ability to produce disease in poultry: low-pathogenicity AI (LPAI) and [highly-pathogenic AI \(HPAI\)](#) [external site]. LPAI naturally occurs in wild birds and can spread to domestic birds. In most cases it causes no signs of infection or only minor symptoms in birds. LPAI H5 and H7 strains have the potential to mutate to HPAI therefore are closely monitored. HPAI is often fatal in poultry and it spreads very quickly. H5N1 is the strain of AI that is rapidly spreading in Asia and other parts of the world. To date, no domestic birds have tested positive for H5 or H7 AI in Washington State.

What are the symptoms of AI in birds?

Low-path AI:

- Nasal or eye discharge
- Swelling below the eyes
- Open mouth breathing/difficulty breathing
- Ruffled feathers
- Decreased egg production
- Decreased appetite or water intake
- No symptoms at all

High-path AI:

- Swollen combs or wattles
- Bluish comb, wattle or legs
- Nasal and eye discharge
- Blood-tinged nasal or eye discharge
- Tilting head
- Lack of coordination
- Depressed/ruffled feathers
- *Sudden death
- High death rate

*Note: When poultry are infected with high-path AI, they may die before symptoms appear.

Can humans get AI?

Normally, animal influenza viruses do not infect humans. However, avian influenza viruses can sometimes cross this barrier and directly affect humans. This was demonstrated in 1997, when an outbreak of an avian influenza (H5N1) virus infected both domestic poultry and humans in Hong Kong, leading to 18 hospitalizations and 6 deaths. Since then, other outbreaks of avian viruses, (such as H9N2 in 1999, H7N2 in 2002, H7N7 in 2003, and H5N1 in 2004) have occurred and been found to directly infect people. Fortunately, avian viruses lack the ability to easily spread from person-to-person and therefore did not precipitate a pandemic.

For more information about AI in humans, visit the [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) website.

How can I protect my birds from AI?

Follow the steps below to protect your birds from AI:

1. Keep your distance-

- a. Restrict access to your poultry and your birds.
- b. Only let caretakers have access to your birds. Your caretakers should not attend bird shows or other events where birds are present.
- c. Provide visitors with boots to wear or have them clean their boots before and after their visit.
- d. Game birds and migratory waterfowl should not have contact with your flock.

2. Keep it clean-

- a. Keep a pair of shoes and a set of clothes to wear only around your birds or clean and disinfect your shoes and launder your clothes before you check on or work around your birds.
- b. Scrubbing your shoes with a long-handled scrub brush and disinfectant will remove droppings, mud or debris.
- c. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap, water and a disinfectant before entering your bird area.

3. Don't haul disease home-

- a. If you travel to places where other birds are present, even to the feed store, be sure to clean and disinfect car and truck tires, and other items that travelled with you.
- b. When returning from the fair or exhibition keep the birds that went to exhibit separate from the rest of the flock for at least 2 weeks.
- c. New birds should be kept separate from your flock for at least 30 days before putting them with the rest of your birds.

4. Don't borrow disease from your neighbor-

- a. Don't share birds, lawn and garden equipment, tools or poultry supplies with your neighbors or other bird owners.
- b. If you borrow these things, disinfect them before you bring them home and when you return them.

5. Know the warning signs of infectious bird disease-

6. Report sick birds-

a. Report signs of unusual illness among birds please contact your private veterinarian, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Avian Health Program at **1-800-606-3056**.

What do I do if my birds have AI symptoms?

If your birds have AI symptoms contact your private veterinarian or the WSDA Avian Health Program at **1-800-606-3056**.