

Avian Influenza

Poultry Biosecurity Practices

F. Dustan Clark, DVM, PhD, DACPV
Extension Poultry Health Veterinarian/ Associate Center Director-Extension
University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture System
Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service

In February 2022, Highly Pathogenic H5N1 Avian Influenza was confirmed in a poultry flock in the USA. Since then, this infectious and highly contagious disease has been detected in wild birds, commercial poultry flocks, and backyard flocks in 42 states. Over 500 premises have been confirmed and more than 47 million birds have been destroyed due to the disease. The latest detection was in a poultry flock in Madison, county Arkansas. The disease can kill many birds in a flock and affects many species of poultry (chickens, turkeys, guinea fowl, etc.). When there is an outbreak a quarantine and surveillance zone is established and poultry within the zone are tested for the disease.

It is extremely important that anyone involved with poultry production should review their premise Biosecurity procedures and protocols. This should be done by small backyard hobby flock owners and growers of commercial poultry to protect the health of their birds. **Commercial poultry growers should follow company Biosecurity guidelines and work closely with their flock supervisors.**

A few simple Biosecurity procedures that can be used by **hobby/ backyard/ small flock owners** are as follows:

Recognize the signs of illness.

You as the poultry owner know your birds and in fact you probably look at your birds more than once a day. As such you can detect early signs of illness such as a change in the bird's behavior; you just know that your birds are just not acting right. There are many poultry diseases but typically some of the first signs of illness are:

- a drop or cessation of egg production
- lack of appetite
- sneezing, gasping
- diarrhea
- drop in water consumption
- discharges from the eye and/or nostril
- ruffled feathers, huddling
- bird keeping to itself.
- birds more quiet than normal
- high number of deaths
- hemorrhages on the legs
- swollen head, wattle, face

Do Not Bring Disease Home With You

If you purchase new birds make sure you look at them closely (even if from a reputable source) to check for signs of illness. This also is correct if it is your own bird returning from a poultry exhibit. Admittedly, poultry exhibitors are trying to place at a show and a sick bird does not win. Unfortunately, it is possible that a bird could still be incubating a disease and some diseases cause few signs unless a bird becomes stressed. It is always best to isolate (quarantine) new and

returning birds away from your home flock for a period of at least 30 days. Most diseases should manifest within this quarantine period. Isolate the birds as far away from your home flock as you can (at least 100 feet, if possible) and be sure and care for these quarantined birds last. Since equipment such as crates, nest boxes, etc could be contaminated with feces, exudates, cages, etc that contain disease organisms it is best to not borrow equipment. If that is not possible then thoroughly clean and disinfect the equipment before taking it onto your premise and before and after usage. If you visit an area where there are waterfowl (such as ponds, lakes, and hunting) or areas with poultry make sure you change clothes and shoes and wash your hands before checking on your birds.

Clean and disinfect.

Keep poultry facilities clean and free of weeds, debris, spilled feed etc. In addition, clean areas around your poultry pens and facilities

Practice good vermin control.

Mice and rats can carry diseases that can infect your birds. They can also attract snakes. Fly, buffalo gnat, and mosquito control are also important since these insects can carry and spread diseases. Wild birds should be excluded from your poultry pens as well. Secure poultry pens are necessary to exclude other wildlife, which may be predators of your poultry or could bring in diseases. Although not vermin, pets should also be kept out of the poultry pens.

Keep away/Restrict visitors

Visitors could accidentally contaminate your poultry. Restrict visitors to your farm/poultry facility. Have all visitors clean their shoes/boots and disinfect before visiting your poultry flock. A pair of boots for visitors to wear and a pair you wear just around your birds are even better. Keep your poultry pens and facilities locked to prevent access.

Get Help/Report the Unusual

If you see something in your flock unusual or is “just not right” get help immediately. Contact your local veterinarian, local county extension agent, Extension poultry veterinarian, state veterinarian, or USDA hotline. If you have a bird die contact your state or university diagnostic laboratory about submitting the bird for testing.

If you have questions or for more information on poultry diseases, care, and husbandry contact the Arkansas Cooperative Extension service , your local county Extension agent, local veterinarian or visit websites www.uada.edu , www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/defend-the-flock-program/df-resources/df-resources ,or contact the numbers listed below if you have questions regarding sick birds:

Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Division Headquarters. info@agriculture.arkansas.gov, (501) 823-1746

John G. Nilz, DVM, Arkansas State Veterinarian. john.nilz@agriculture.arkansas.gov, 501- 297-2250

Blake Walters. Livestock and Poultry Field Services. blake.walters@agriculture.arkansas.gov, (870) 519-0725

F. Dustan Clark, DVM, Arkansas Extension Poultry Veterinarian: fdclark@uark.edu, 479-957-4245