

ADVICE ON ASSESSING RISKS OF AVIAN INFLUENZA WHERE POULTRY ARE KEPT

Background

All keepers of birds need to maintain biosecurity to protect their birds from avian diseases. They also need to prepare a contingency plan so that they are prepared for any increase in the risk of disease. Always discuss your biosecurity and contingency plans with your private veterinary surgeon. This guidance helps you to do this.

Why biosecurity is important

Good biosecurity is vital in protecting your birds from disease. Many diseases, including avian influenza are spread by direct bird-to-bird contact through secretions and faeces and by indirect spread through contaminated feed, water, implements, clothing etc. Taking steps to ensure good hygiene and standards of cleanliness will reduce the risk of disease spread. More information is available in the [Defra Biosecurity Code for Poultry Keepers](#).

If you answer yes to any of the questions below, your birds may be at greater risk than others. You should consult your private veterinary surgeon now to consider how you can reduce risks and what contingencies you should put in place.

- Is your holding near an area of open water or other area where wild birds, especially water fowl, are known to congregate, for example during migration?
- Do your birds have access to outdoor areas?
- Are any such outdoor areas open to wild birds?
- Do you feed and/or water your birds outside?
- Are there other animals on the holding with which your birds have contact?
- Do you share contractors, suppliers or employees with other poultry keepers?
- Do you attend bird fairs or shows?
- Do you farm birds on more than one site?
- Do you move birds to sites shared with other poultry keepers?
- Do you, your family or your contractors travel to areas currently experiencing avian influenza?

Assessing the risk of disease spread on your premises

In assessing biosecurity on your premises and contingency plans, you should consider the following questions.

1. Wild birds and animals can carry diseases.

- a) Do you take measures to minimise direct and indirect contact with wild birds, poultry from other sites and other animals?
Can wild birds and other animals contaminate your birds' feed and drinking water?

2. Infection can be spread on clothes, footwear, hands and vehicles. Do you

- a) only allow visitors where essential and keep a record of all those who do come onto your premises?
- b) have a 'clean on', 'clean off' policy on your premises and the equipment and approved disinfectant to maintain it? The policy should include staff, visitors, equipment and vehicles. [Defra biosecurity guidance](#) gives guidance on policies that are suitable for times when the country is free of exotic disease and times when it is not. This guidance is also available from your local Animal Health Divisional Office.

3. It is vital to spot signs of disease early. Do you carry out regular checks on your birds and keep up to date records that will alert you to loss of appetite, weight loss, reduced egg production etc? Veterinary advice should be sought on suspicion of disease. Avian influenza is a notifiable disease. The law says you must tell the Divisional Veterinary Manager (DVM) at the local Animal Health Divisional Office immediately if you suspect disease. Information on clinical signs of [Avian Influenza](#) and [Newcastle Disease](#) are available on the Defra website.

4. Once disease has entered your premises it can spread quickly. Are you confident that your everyday routines maintain cleanliness to prevent disease entering your flock? This includes:

- supplying clean, fresh drinking water to your birds.
- flushing through and regularly cleaning water lines and drinkers.
- cleaning and regularly maintaining feed bins, hoppers and feeding equipment.
- disposing of damaged eggs and dead birds promptly and properly.
- regular and proper disposal of litter and manure.
- regularly cleansing and disinfecting all crates, containers and other equipment before and after use.
- always cleansing and disinfecting equipment (including injecting and dosing equipment) before moving it into or using it in a different poultry building.

5. Disease causing agents can remain on the premises even when birds are not there. Is your routine at the end of a cycle sufficient to prevent any disease present from infecting your new flock? This includes:

- removing all surplus feed, dead birds and litter and disposing of them safely.
- carrying out rodent and pest control.
- thoroughly cleansing the building and all equipment including ducts, drains and fans.
- disinfecting the premises and all equipment.
- cleansing and disinfecting the equipment and protective clothing used for these procedures.

6. The risk of a disease might require you to bring free-range birds inside. Do you have a contingency plan in place to allow you to do this? The plan should cover where your flock will be housed, how your flock will be managed inside possibly for extended periods of time and take account of welfare issues. Can you enclose some of the area immediately outside your houses – eg a verandah or roof a larger area with netting?

7. Avian influenza can affect the health of those who work closely with poultry. Have you carried out a risk assessment on worker protection and sought advice from the Health and Safety Executive? The guidance on the [HSE website](#) is kept under review and updated.

What should I do if any of my birds die?

If you suspect avian influenza (or any other notifiable disease) please contact your private veterinary surgeon. If the dead birds are handled, it is important to wash your hands with soap and water as soon as possible. Avoid touching your face and certainly do not eat until you have washed your hands. Clean any soiling on clothing with soap and water.

What should I do next?

The risk of disease is always present. If you have identified your birds as at greater risk or your answers to any of the questions 1-5 above are “no”, you should consider your biosecurity procedures urgently with your private veterinary surgeon. The [Defra Biosecurity Code for Poultry Keepers](#) will help in deciding what needs to be done. The Code can also be obtained from your local Animal Health Divisional Office.

If your answer to question 6 is “no”, you should draw up a contingency plan with the help of your private veterinary surgeon. You may need to consider how to extend existing housing.

If your answer to question 7 is “no”, you should seek advice from the Health and Safety Executive. Their website is <http://www.hse.gov.uk/>.

For further information the following websites are of value:

www.defra.gov.uk

www.dh.gov.uk

www.hpa.org.uk

www.hse.gov.uk

www.bvpa.org.uk

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