

Biosecurity and preventing disease: Peace of mind, a healthier flock and a more viable business

Why should I read this leaflet?

The Government wants to help you prevent your birds from becoming ill. In particular, you should now:

- Review and assess your risk of disease with your vet.
- Plan how you will manage any free range birds if there is a need to isolate them from wild birds.
- Feed and water birds indoors where possible to reduce mixing between your birds and wild birds.
- Practice good biosecurity.
- Be vigilant and monitor your birds frequently.

There is more detail below.

Biosecurity is important

Biosecurity means taking steps to ensure good hygiene practices are in place so that the risk of a disease occurring or spreading is minimised.

Good biosecurity should be practised at all times, not just during a disease outbreak. Taking the right measures at all times can help protect your birds, your business, the industry and the community.

What are the benefits?

Good biosecurity:

- helps keep out exotic poultry diseases such as Avian flu and Newcastle Disease;
- reduces the risk of zoonotic diseases such as salmonella becoming established;
- limits the spread of diseases and helps to protect your neighbours, public health and the countryside;
- improves overall flock health;
- cuts costs of disease treatment; and
- reduces losses, which could improve farm profitability.

How does disease spread?

Disease is spread through:

- movement of poultry, people, vehicles and equipment between and within farms;
- the introduction of birds of low or unknown health status;
- contact with neighbours' flocks;
- using shared farm equipment and vehicles, which have not been effectively cleansed and disinfected;

- contact with vermin and wild birds;
- birds drinking from contaminated water sources;
- birds eating contaminated feed; and
- unsatisfactory cleansing and disinfection of vehicles, sheds, feeding troughs and other equipment.

Actions now and planning ahead

Whether you already practice strong biosecurity or not, the Government is encouraging all bird keepers to follow the following steps:

- You should feed and water free range birds indoors where possible to reduce mixing between your birds and wild birds.
- If you farm free range birds you should plan how you will manage them if there is a need to isolate them from wild birds.
- Look at the guidance on local risk assessment available online at http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/monitoring/pdf/avianinfluenza_riskassuk.pdf from your local Animal Health Divisional Office or from the Defra helpline on 08459 33 55 77.
- The risk assessment will help you draw up a plan with your vet for the practical steps you can take to reduce the risk of disease spreading.
- The plan should include an isolation period for all new stock, and regular sampling procedures for certain diseases, including Avian flu.
- Make sure all your records are accurate and up-to-date to ensure that your produce is fully traceable.
- If you have staff, give them the information and training they need to maintain strict standards of hygiene and biosecurity at all times. If they are allowed to keep their own birds at home, they will need to be extra vigilant for signs of disease and even more careful about biosecurity both at home and on your farm.

How to stop disease – keep your farm clean

- Don't bring infection onto your farm, or spread it around your farm, on your clothes, footwear or hands. Clean overalls and footwear must be worn when entering poultry farms. Protective clothing and footwear should be removed and either cleansed and disinfected, laundered or disposed of after use.
- Strictly limit and control access to poultry flocks. If possible the site should be fenced with a controlled entry point. Visitors and their vehicles should be limited and as far as possible kept away from poultry buildings and pastures.
- Have pressure washers, brushes, hoses, water and an approved disinfectant available. Make sure they are used by visitors to clean vehicles, equipment and boots both before entry and on leaving.
- Clean and disinfect all vehicles after each journey. If possible, do not use the same vehicles for transporting birds, feed, manure or other wastes.
- Regularly clean and disinfect all crates, containers and other equipment before and after use. Do not move any equipment into different poultry buildings without cleaning and disinfecting it first. This also applies to injecting and dosing equipment.

- Keep farm access routes, parking areas, yards, areas around buildings and storage areas clean and tidy and well maintained. This helps avoid wild birds and animals being attracted onto the site and entering buildings and stores.
- Wild birds can carry poultry diseases. Minimise contact between poultry and wild birds. Prevent accumulation of standing water and remove spilled feed that could attract wild birds. Maintain buildings to ensure that wild birds do not nest or roost in them.
- Keep wild birds, dogs, cats, rodents or other livestock out of poultry buildings and feed stores.
- Have an active rodent and pest control system in place. Be vigilant for evidence of vermin. Monitor vermin activity by baiting and trapping.
- Supply only clean fresh drinking water to birds. Water lines and drinkers must be flushed through and cleaned regularly. In the case of free-range birds restrict access to possible sources of standing water used by wild birds.
- Feed bins, hoppers and feeding equipment must be cleaned and maintained regularly. Feed silos and containers must be sealed to prevent animals and wild birds contaminating feed.
- Feed should only be obtained from a mill or supplier that operates in accordance with relevant Defra and AIC Codes of Practice who will make available results of salmonella tests on request.
- Damaged eggs, dead birds, litter and manure may carry disease. Dispose of them promptly and properly.
- At depopulation at the end of a cycle, thoroughly clean the building and all equipment, including ducting, drains and fans. Remove all surplus feed, dead birds and litter. Disinfect the premises and all equipment and carry out rodent and other pest control. Cleaning equipment and protective clothing should also be cleaned and disinfected.

Be vigilant!

Look out for signs of disease in your flock.

Increased mortality, falling egg production and respiratory distress may be early signs of a disease problem.

If you suspect disease, ask your vet for advice as soon as possible. Do not wait for more evidence – some diseases can spread very quickly! Avian influenza and Newcastle Disease are notifiable diseases. You must tell the Divisional Veterinary Manager (DVM) at the local Animal Health Divisional Office immediately if you suspect these diseases.

You can find out more about diseases such as Avian flu and Newcastle Disease, including what to look out for and clinical signs, on the Defra website at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/vetsurveillance/species/birds/index.htm>

Buying new stock

- Always make sure you know the health status of any birds you are buying or moving.

- Incoming stock should be isolated from the rest of the flock – discuss this with your vet and agree a testing and monitoring programme.
- Only place new stock in facilities which you know have been cleansed and disinfected.
- Keep isolation buildings as near as possible to the farm entrance, and separate from other poultry buildings.
- Use separate equipment when handling isolated stock. If you have enough staff on your farm, allocate some of them to deal only with isolated stock. If not, make sure you handle isolated stock last. Always wash and change into clean overalls and boots before going back to your main flock buildings.

Taking care of your birds

The welfare of your birds is always an important concern, and particularly so in the case of a disease outbreak. Movement restrictions can have a negative impact on poultry, with confinement potentially leading to health and behavioral problems. Having a contingency plan in place will make sure the welfare of your flock remains a priority at a critical time.

For guidance and information on poultry welfare, call the Defra Helpline on 08459 33 55 77.

Protect your flock! Protect your industry!

Always practice good biosecurity, ask your vet for advice if you suspect disease and report any suspicions of Avian influenza or Newcastle Disease to your Defra Divisional Veterinary Manager without delay.

For more information, call the Defra Helpline on 08459 33 55 77.

The Defra website has further information on biosecurity and poultry diseases, including what to look out for - visit

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/vetsurveillance/species/birds/index.htm>