



*United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Veterinary Services/California-Nevada Area Office
10365 Old Placerville Rd., Suite 210
Sacramento, California 95827
(916) 854-3950 – office*



*California Department of Food and Agriculture
Office of the State Veterinarian
Animal Health and Food Safety Services
1220 N Street
Sacramento, California 95814
(916) 900-5000 – office*

March 23, 2015

Dear Bird Owner:

We are investigating an incidence of H7N3 Low Pathogenicity Avian Influenza that was detected in a commercial turkey operation in Merced County, California.

To date, the avian influenza strains detected within the United States, including the H7N3 strain, have not been found to be transmissible to humans. Properly cooked poultry and eggs are safe to eat. Birds from the involved flocks will not enter the food system.

Avian influenza, commonly called the bird flu, is a disease found in a wide variety of domesticated and wild birds. Cases are classified as either low pathogenicity or high pathogenicity based on the severity of the illness they cause in poultry. Once introduced into an area, infection can spread through bird-to-bird contact or through contact with contaminated people, feed, or equipment. It is important that you are aware of the signs of avian influenza and the methods you can use to reduce the risk of your birds becoming infected.

Your birds depend on you to keep them healthy. **If you observe signs of illness or increased mortality, please call the Sick Bird Hotline, your local CDFA Animal Health Branch District office, or the USDA Veterinary Services (VS) toll free number below.** We also encourage you to submit any dead birds to the California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory's Necropsy Services for California Backyard Poultry Owners Program (information included).

| Contact Information | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Sick Bird Hotline | (866) 922-2473 |
| CDFA Modesto District | (209) 491-9350 |
| CDFA Ontario District | (909) 947-4462 |
| CDFA Redding District | (530) 225-2140 |
| CDFA Tulare District | (559) 685-3500 |
| USDA-VS Toll Free | (877) 741-3690 |

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/>

[http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/Animal Health/Avian Influenza.html](http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/Animal_Health/Avian_Influenza.html)

Sincerely,


 Dr. Larry Rawson
 USDA APHIS Assistant District Director SPRS 6


 Dr. Annette Jones
 California State Veterinarian

Q. What is Avian Influenza (AI)?

A. Avian Influenza (AI), commonly called bird flu, is a disease found naturally among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect poultry and other bird and animal species.

Influenza is characterized by two groups of surface proteins known as hemagglutinin (H) and neuraminidase (N). There are 18 different types of hemagglutinin proteins (H1-H18) and 11 different types of neuraminidase proteins (N1-N11), resulting in 198 possible subtypes, many of these affecting birds.

AI viruses can also be classified into low and high pathogenicity forms based on the severity of the illness they cause in poultry.



Most strains are classified as low pathogenicity AI (LPAI) and typically cause little or no clinical signs in poultry. In contrast, high pathogenicity AI (HPAI) causes a severe and extremely contagious disease. **While LPAI is considered lower risk, some LPAI H5 and H7 types have the capacity to mutate into HPAI.**

Q. What are the clinical signs of AI in birds?

A. **Low pathogenic AI signs may include:** Nasal or eye discharge, swelling below the eyes, difficulty breathing, and decreased appetite/water intake.

Highly pathogenic AI signs may include: bleeding, bruising, bluish/swollen combs or wattles, a significant drop in egg production, and sudden death with mortality rates that can approach 100 percent in a flock. When poultry are infected with HPAI, they may die before they show any symptoms.

Q. How is the disease spread?

A. Migratory waterfowl have been found to be carriers of recent AI virus strains found in poultry. Influenza primarily spreads by contact between healthy and infected birds and through contact with contaminated equipment and materials. The virus is shed in the feces and in secretions from the nose, mouth and eyes. Contact with infected fecal material is the most common method of bird-to-bird transmission.



The AI virus can spread in the air between birds in a poultry house and between poultry premises with the movement of contaminated equipment, or by people carrying the virus on their

shoes, clothes or hands. It can also spread to other flocks on unwashed eggs. Airborne transmission of virus from farm to farm is highly unlikely.

Q. Does LPAI/HPAI exist in the U.S.?

A. Incidents of LPAI are occasionally detected in domestic poultry. In early 2015 and for the first time in over 10 years, multiple incidents of HPAI (H5N8 and H5N2) have been found in migratory waterfowl, backyard flocks and commercial poultry flocks in the U.S. Commercial poultry flocks have been affected in California and Midwest states (e.g. Missouri and Minnesota).

Q. Does AI affect pet birds (e.g. parrots, parakeets)?

A. Although it is rare, AI infection is possible in pet birds if they come into contact with infected birds.



Q. What should you do if your birds have signs of AI?

A. If your birds have signs of AI, or may have been exposed to birds with the disease, you should immediately notify your local veterinarian, the Sick Bird Hotline, local CDFA District Office, or USDA-Veterinary Services.

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| CDFA Redding District | (530) 225-2140 |
| CDFA Tulare District | (559) 685-3500 |
| CDFA Sacramento (Headquarters) | (916) 900-5002 |
| USDA-VS Toll Free | (877) 741-3690 |

If you observe signs of AI in wild birds or wild waterfowl, please call:

**California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Wildlife Investigations Laboratory
916-358-2790**

Q. How is AI diagnosed in birds?

A. Swab samples taken from the throat and/or the cloaca, blood samples and sick or dead birds are sent to a USDA-approved laboratory. The California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory system, with facilities in Davis, San Bernardino, Tulare, and Turlock, is the primary laboratory used in California. If a screening test is positive, the samples are sent for confirmatory testing at the National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa. The final analysis determines if the strain is HPAI or LPAI.

Q. What will happen if your birds are confirmed positive for AI?

- A. If birds are confirmed positive, USDA and CDFA personnel will work with you to eradicate the disease and depopulate the flock if necessary.

Q. How are birds monitored for AI?

- A. USDA, CDFA, county cooperative extensions, veterinarians, poultry businesses and bird enthusiasts collaborate to ensure that various populations of birds are tested for AI to detect any incursion as soon as possible.

USDA and CDFA veterinarians are trained to diagnose foreign animal diseases, such as AI, and investigate any suspicious diseases. This effective surveillance relies on close communication between veterinarians and farm personnel. Animal health officials also screen birds for HPAI where live birds are sold, such as at live bird markets, feed stores, pet stores and swap meets.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), federal wildlife agencies and universities collaborate to survey wild birds in a national wildlife surveillance plan.

Q. Does AI threaten human health?

- A. Some strains of AI viruses can infect people having close, direct contact with infected birds.

There is no immediate public health concern associated with the current strains found in the United States.

The potential for the virus to mutate into a form that spreads from person-to-person is a serious public health concern. Since December 2003, a growing number of Asian, European and African countries have reported outbreaks of HPAI; the rapid spread of HPAI is historically unprecedented and of growing concern for human and animal health.

Q. Does proper food handling prevent AI?

- A. Ongoing surveillance and mandatory inspections prevent diseased poultry from entering the food chain. Proper handling and cooking of poultry and eggs protects people against the virus. Poultry and egg products imported to the



U.S. must meet all safety standards applied to foods produced in the U.S. Safe food handling and preparation is important at all times.

Poultry and eggs that have been properly cooked to internal temperature of 165° F are still safe to consume. Birds from affected flocks will not enter the food system!

Q. Is there an AI vaccine available in California?

- A. No, an AI vaccine is not available or approved for use in the State of California. Although AI vaccines can be found in other parts of the world, they are not commonly used because no vaccine covers all the strains of the disease.

Q. What can poultry producers and backyard flock owners do to prevent AI?

- A. Poultry producers and backyard flock owners should strengthen their **biosecurity** practices. **Biosecurity** includes any practice that can reduce the risk of introducing disease to a premises.



To be effective, **biosecurity** must be practiced diligently at all times, without exception, by everyone that comes in contact with the premises. Here are some important tips:

- Discourage waterfowl from using ponds on your property and consider draining these, if feasible.
- Keep poultry confined in houses and/or enclose an exercise area with netting.
- Avoid use of water that comes from sources where waterfowl may congregate during migration.
- Avoid waterfowl hunting during migration; otherwise, ensure clothing, footwear, vehicles, etc. used during hunts are laundered and/or disinfected.
- Do not to co-mingle chickens and other poultry with waterfowl (wild or domestic).
- Do not share birds, equipment or feed with other bird owners.
- Avoid visits to other backyard flocks or poultry operations and restrict access to your birds.
- If visitors are necessary, provide disposable coveralls, boots, and head coverings.
- Scrub and remove all debris from your footwear, giving particular attention to the soles, with soap and water and spray with a disinfectant.
- Consider using a disinfectant foot bath with a scrub mat at the entrance to your bird area.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect (C&D) vehicles and equipment entering or leaving the premises.
- Protect flocks from exposure to wild birds, rodents and insects.
- Control movement associated with the disposal of mortality, litter and manure.
- Isolate and observe new flock additions and returning show birds off-site for 30 days for signs of disease.





California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory Necropsy Services for California Backyard Poultry Owners



The California Animal Health and Food Safety (CAHFS) Laboratory System is the backbone of California's warning system that helps to protect the health of California's livestock and poultry. CAHFS serves the people of California by safeguarding the public health with rapid and reliable diagnoses for animal diseases affecting humans. CAHFS operates in partnership with the CDFA, UC Davis, livestock and poultry producers, and California Veterinarians.

Veterinarians and Owners of Backyard Poultry are encouraged to submit sick or recently dead birds for necropsy (postmortem) examination

- **Standard diagnostic work for one or two birds per submission is performed at **no charge*** to the owner.**
- The necropsy service is available to California backyard flock owners of fewer than 1,000 birds (chickens, turkeys, waterfowl, and squab). *Free service does not include pet birds, game birds, or racing pigeons.*
- If submitting a recently dead bird(s), carcass(es) must be kept cold (in a cooler or equivalent).
- Submission form must be included at time of submission. Submission form, guidelines, and shipping instructions can be found at: http://cahfs.ucdavis.edu/submission_forms/index.cfm
- This program assists with the State's surveillance program to monitor and detect immediate threats of disease.
- The Information obtained from the diagnostic work is invaluable for monitoring the spread of disease.

**If delivered by mail, shipping and handling costs are at the owner's expense.*

For more information contact a local CAHFS laboratory or CDFA:

CAHFS - Davis Laboratory
University of California
620 W. Health Sciences Dr.
Davis, CA 95616
Phone: (530) 752-8700
cahfsdavis@cahfs.ucdavis.edu

CAHFS - Tulare Laboratory
18830 Road 112
Tulare, CA
93274
Phone: (559) 688-7543
cahfstulare@cahfs.ucdavis.edu

CAHFS - San Bernardino Laboratory
105 W. Central Avenue
San Bernardino, CA
92408
Phone: (909) 383-4287
cahfssanbernardino@cahfs.ucdavis.edu

CAHFS - Turlock Laboratory
1550 North Soderquist Rd.
Turlock, CA
95380
Phone: (209) 634-5837
cahfsturlock@cahfs.ucdavis.edu



| Other Contact Information | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| CDFA Sacramento (HQ) | (916) 900-5002 |
| CDFA Modesto District | (209) 491-9350 |
| CDFA Ontario District | (909) 947-4462 |
| CDFA Redding District | (530) 225-2140 |
| CDFA Tulare District | (559) 685-3500 |
| USDA-VS Toll Free | (877) 741-3690 |
| Sick Bird Hotline | (866) 922-2473 |
| CDFW Wildlife Investigations Lab | (916) 358-2790 |



For more information, visit the following Web sites at: http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/Animal_Health/Avian_Health_Program.html and <http://www.cahfs.ucdavis.edu/>.