



## Avian Influenza: Frequently Asked Questions

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### **1. What is avian influenza (AI)?**

AI is a highly contagious viral disease of birds. It is carried by wild aquatic birds, especially waterfowl, which are not greatly affected by the virus. There are AI viruses of low pathogenicity to poultry (LPAI) that cause mild disease and others that are highly pathogenic (HPAI) that cause severe symptoms, including death. Under some circumstances, a LPAI virus can mutate to become HPAI. Avian influenza in any of its forms is a serious threat to the poultry industry. It can make domesticated birds such as chickens and turkeys very sick and may lead to high mortality.

### **2. Where does highly pathogenic avian influenza virus reside?**

Many of the migratory species of bird that can carry the avian influenza virus use breeding grounds in Siberia and northern North America. Species from Asia and North America are known to inter-mingle in western Alaska. On these breeding grounds, there is opportunity for AI viruses of various types to be transmitted between birds and to co-exist in the same bird. Mutations and transfer of genetic material between viruses can lead to new AI virus types. Since the virus is not typically pathogenic to these migratory species, they are able to carry it vast distances when they migrate. When the wild birds fly south for the winter months, their migratory pathways take them over much of the US, where they can deposit new and old versions of the virus along the way and affect commercial, backyard, and recreational flocks.

### **3. What are the species of wild birds that can carry highly pathogenic avian influenza but not die from it?**

Wild aquatic birds such as gulls, terns, shorebirds, and waterfowl (ducks, geese, swans) are carriers of the avian influenza virus and generally will not exhibit clinical signs when infected. These species are considered reservoirs for avian influenza viruses. Other birds can become infected, shed the virus, and display clinical symptoms. HPAI will kill many species of birds except for the aquatic birds mentioned previously.

### **4. When and where was the most recent confirmation of HPAI in the United States?**

March 2017, HPAI was confirmed on a broiler breeder farm in Lincoln County, Tennessee.

### **5. Can humans contract avian influenza?**

The risk of contracting avian influenza from birds is extremely low. Avian influenza viruses do not usually infect humans. There have been rare cases of avian influenza cross-infection in humans, which were the result of very close physical contact with the infected birds or with the secretions and feces of infected birds.

### **6. Can someone contract avian influenza from eating poultry meat or eggs?**

You cannot get avian influenza from poultry meat and eggs that have been properly cooked. It has been proven that proper cooking will destroy avian influenza virus. Further, all commercial poultry flocks in the US are tested for avian influenza virus. Meat or egg products from infected flocks are prohibited from entering the market.

**7. What are the symptoms of avian influenza?**

- Sudden increase in bird mortality
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing, sneezing
- Watery or green diarrhea
- Lethargy
- Swelling around the eyes, neck and head
- Purple discoloration of wattles, combs and legs
- Incoordination or paralysis
- Twisting of the head/neck down under the body in turkeys
- Sudden, severe drop in feed and water consumption
- Sudden, severe drop in egg production

**8. What measures can be taken to prevent a poultry flock from contracting avian influenza?**

There is no acceptable or practical treatment once birds have contracted highly pathogenic avian influenza. Also, we cannot keep migratory birds from carrying the virus into our region and depositing it wherever they go. Prevention of infection is the best strategy. To protect the health of poultry and other domestic birds in our state, we need:

- Enhanced biosecurity measures that prevent the virus from contacting poultry.
- Heightened surveillance and diagnostics to quickly identify infected flocks so they can be handled to prevent the virus from being transmitted from them to infect other birds.

Biosecurity basics include: reducing the number of the visitors to the farm and recording who is allowed on the premise, preventing any contact of the flock with wild birds, using dedicated footwear and clothing prior to entering the bird area of each poultry house, and using a dry or liquid footbath to disinfect shoes prior to entry.

**9. If someone's flock is experiencing high mortality or exhibits symptoms of avian influenza, what should they do?**

A decision guide has been developed and sent to all county extension offices. It also has been placed on the UGA CES Avian Flu webpage. It describes symptoms that can indicate a case of AI. The GPLN Avian Influenza Hotline (**770-766-6850**) should be called if a flock shows symptoms. Other information about avian influenza can be found on the UGA Avian Flu webpage,

[<http://extension.uga.edu/topics/poultry/avian-flu/>]

**10. Is there any special need in responding to avian influenza that is specific for organic growers?**

No, organic growers need to receive the same information, i.e., to protect their flocks with effective biosecurity. The only thing that might be emphasized in communications with organic producers is to suggest housing birds indoors during the Fall and Winter months if possible to minimize contact with migrating wild birds.

**11. What happens if highly pathogenic influenza is found in a local poultry flock?**

See the document on the CES Avian Flu webpage entitled, *What happens if HPAI hits poultry in your county?*, for details on the Georgia plan for local response to HPAI.

**12. In the event that there is a positive case of avian influenza, what is the best way to find at risk backyard flocks in the area?**

Flocks that have been registered through the Department of Agriculture will already be recognized and tested if deemed necessary. The link at which people can register their backyard flocks is as follows. [<http://georgiapremisesregistration.com/>]

Census teams recruited by incident command under the authority of the Georgia Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture may go door-to-door in the Control Area established around the infected premise to locate at-risk flocks and provide information to flock owners on what to do if their birds start to show symptoms of AI.

See the document on the CES Avian Flu webpage entitled, *What Happens if HPAI Hits Poultry in Your County?*, for more details on the Georgia plan for local response to HPAI.

**13. What's the most effective way to identify the backyard poultry producers in my county?**

We encourage agents to be innovative in getting to know flock owners in their counties. One important thing to communicate is that people should register their flocks with the Georgia Department of Agriculture so that they can be served promptly if HPAI breaks out near them. This can be done in informational meetings or by posting the information to register flocks at feed stores, farm and garden supply stores, pet stores, etc.

[<http://georgiapremisesregistration.com/>]

**14. Is there a way to receive notifications when positive cases of avian influenza are confirmed in other states?**

When an outbreak occurs, UGA Poultry Science Extension will notify members of the Extension Service via e-mail. Updates and other AI information will be posted to the UGA Avian Flu website:

[<http://extension.uga.edu/topics/poultry/avian-flu/>]

**15. Is burying the best method for backyard flock owners to dispose of dead birds infected with avian influenza?**

The incident management team under the authority of the Georgia Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture will be responsible for the disposition of backyard flocks having to be euthanized because of avian influenza.

**16. What is the best procedure to recommend for composting mortality from an avian influenza infection?**

For small flocks, removal and disposal of birds from premises will be coordinated by the Georgia Department of Agriculture.

**17. What are the protocols for dealing with other animals that are within the control area surrounding a premise infected with avian influenza?**

Non-avian species of animals are not susceptible to highly pathogenic AI; however, they or equipment associated with them, can physically carry the virus if contact is made with the virus somehow. For the first 24-48 hours after confirmation of highly pathogenic AI, it is intended that all movement of animals, and vehicles and equipment used for animal transport, stops in the 6-mile control area. This is to prevent spread of the virus while incident responders focus efforts on dealing with the infected premise and on identification of additional premises that may have been exposed to the HPAI virus. Thereafter, animals and equipment may be moved by permit from the incident commander. This may require testing to verify that what is to be moved is free of virus.

See the document on the CES Avian Flu webpage entitled: *“What Happens if HPAI Hits Poultry in Your County?”* for more details on the Georgia plan for local response to HPAI.

**18. If AI is detected in a backyard flock, will it have a detrimental effect on Georgia exports?**

Many of our trading partners will cease importing poultry product when given notice of an HPAI outbreak in poultry. Depending on the nation, this may involve only poultry products from the affected area, but some nations will ban imports from any part of the US. Exports will resume when it is verified to the satisfaction of the nation receiving the exported product that the avian influenza virus has been eradicated.

**19. In the event that AI is identified, does the GA Department of Agriculture take over the operation of quarantine, movement control, testing, etc.?**

See the document on the CES Avian Flu webpage entitled, *“What Happens if HPAI Hits Poultry in Your County?”* for more details on the Georgia plan for local response to HPAI.

**20. Who should a flock owner contact if they are concerned their flock may have avian influenza?**

They should call the Georgia Poultry Lab Network Avian Influenza Hotline (**770-766-6850**). The Georgia Poultry Lab Network is an agency of the Georgia Department of Agriculture.

**21. Should small flock owners register their flocks with the Georgia Department of Agriculture?**

Any small flock owners who register their flocks with the Georgia Department of Agriculture will be appropriately informed in the event of an AI outbreak. Small flocks can registered at the Georgia Premises Registration website.

[<http://georgiapremisesregistration.com/>]

**22. What is acceptable for county agents to write in articles for local news media?**

All resources that are available on the UGA Avian Influenza website, [extension.uga.edu/topics/poultry/avian-flu/] or [preventAI.uga.edu] can be used to provide general, fact-based information for the local community. If there are requests for specific feedback or follow-up interviews, then Faith Peppers (Director of Public Affairs for the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences; pepper@uga.edu) should be notified to ensure a consistent message is being delivered from State of Georgia representatives.

**23. Are there simple, one-page handouts for biosecurity for backyard flock owners?**

In addition to the information that's available on the UGA Avian Influenza website, [extension.uga.edu/topics/poultry/avian-flu/] or [preventAI.uga.edu], the Georgia Department of Agriculture's website [agr.georgia.gov/avian-influenza.aspx] has links to a short USDA "Biosecurity for Birds" document that is available in multiple languages

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