

## Protecting Your Flock from Avian Influenza

Avian Influenza (AI), commonly known as Bird Flu, has been the topic of much discussion over the past several months. AI is a group of viruses that affects both domestic and wild birds. Some signs of AI include: sudden death; lack of energy and appetite; decreased egg production; soft-shelled or misshapen eggs; swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks; purple discoloration of the comb, wattles, and legs; nasal discharge; coughing and sneezing; lack of coordination; and diarrhea.

AI can be spread directly by birds coming into contact with infected birds, and indirectly by birds coming in contact with manure, equipment, vehicles, and people whose clothing or footwear have come into contact with the virus. Implementing a sound biosecurity plan can help reduce the chance of introducing AI into your flock. Consider the following:

1. Restrict access where your birds are kept. Limit access to only those caring for the birds. Visitors, especially other bird owners, should not be around your birds. Wild birds should not have contact with your flock.
2. Good hygiene is very important. Before entering your bird area, put on clean clothes, disinfect your footwear, and wash your hands. Clean cages and equipment regularly. Dispose of dead birds properly.
3. If you have been around other birds or bird owners, change clothes and disinfect your footwear prior to contact with your birds. Disinfect the tires on your vehicle before going home. If your birds have been around other birds, for example, at a fair, isolate them from the rest of the flock for two weeks. Watch for signs of sickness before allowing them to rejoin the flock. If you purchase new birds, isolate them from the flock for 30 days. Do not borrow equipment, tools, or poultry supplies from other bird owners.
4. If your birds become sick or if you have sudden death losses, report it. Locally, you can contact your veterinarian, cooperative extension office, or state veterinarian. Also, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) maintains a toll-free hot line you can call. That number is (866) 536-7593 (866) 536-7593 . Reporting possible cases of AI can help stop the spread of the disease.

Today, Avian Influenza remains largely a threat to birds. In Asia, people with extensive direct contact with infected birds have become infected with a strain of the virus, and some have died. A great concern is the potential for the virus to mutate, resulting in a virus that could be passed from person to person. Clearly, this would be a major public health concern. It is important for bird owners to do all they can to fight AI.

Information for this article was obtained from [www.avianflu.gov](http://www.avianflu.gov), which is maintained by the United States Department of Agriculture. Another informative web site is [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org), which is maintained by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Readers are encouraged to visit these sites for additional information.