



Avian influenza (bird flu)

The risk of bird flu reaching Australia is low but it's important to keep watch for signs of the disease.

What is bird flu?

Bird flu is a highly infectious disease of birds.

Which birds are affected?

All bird species are thought to be susceptible to bird flu. The disease can affect more than 140 bird species.

Many wild birds and waterfowl (especially geese, ducks and swans) carry the virus but generally don't show signs of the disease. However, they can infect other birds and poultry they come into contact with.

What do I look for?

Sudden death in birds is an obvious sign.

Other common signs to look for include:

- ruffled feathers
- unusual head or neck posture
- inability to walk or stand
- reluctance to move, eat or drink
- droopy appearance
- respiratory distress
- diarrhoea
- swollen head, wattle or comb
- a drop in egg production.

How does the disease spread?

Moving live birds, animal to animal contact, bites and scratches spreads disease.

Air, droppings, clothing, footwear, skin, mucus, animal bedding, feed and water containers, cages, vehicles and equipment can all carry and spread disease.

Meat and eggs can also become contaminated and further spread disease.

Wild birds and pest animals can carry diseases and pose a risk. Disease spreads quickly if domestic birds mix with wild birds and animals.

Avian influenza can remain infective in manure, water and carcasses for many days, if not weeks, depending on the temperature.

The key facts

- All bird species can be susceptible to avian influenza.
- Avian influenza in birds does not easily cause disease in humans.
- Australians are at little risk through normal contact with birds. Human infection usually requires very close contact with sick or dead birds.
- There is only a remote possibility of a human pandemic influenza developing in Australia as a result of migratory birds carrying avian influenza.
- Aviary birds, caged birds and backyard birds are at little risk if you prevent them mixing with wild birds and protect their feed and water supply from contamination.
- Australia is well prepared to respond to an avian influenza outbreak.
- Australia has a surveillance program to detect incursions of avian influenza.
- Surveillance continues to show the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 strain is not present in Australia.
- It is safe to eat properly cooked eggs, meat and poultry products.
- Freezing infected poultry does not kill the disease.



Human health

Generally, humans are not affected. But the H5N1 strain causing the most concern worldwide can infect humans.

Infection is passed to humans through handling live infected birds, through contact with bird faeces or through slaughter, de-feathering or butchering infected birds.

People are **not** infected through eating properly cooked poultry meat or eggs.

Always wash hands and kitchenware with soap and hot water or disinfectant after contact with raw products.

What is Australia doing about bird flu?

Australia is well prepared to respond to an avian influenza outbreak. Well developed and tested plans are in place to respond to animal disease emergencies.

Australia has an emergency response veterinary plan (AUSVETPLAN) and other national arrangements including access to the world's best diagnostic facilities.

Exercise Eleusis, a simulated exercise in 2005 tested the industry and government's capability to manage an outbreak of avian influenza and make improvements to plans and response arrangements.

Australia has successfully eradicated five previous outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza, the last in 1997. These outbreaks were not the H5N1 strain.

Commercial poultry producers have strict biosecurity measures in place to prevent wild birds coming into contact with their poultry.

Border control

The Australian Government closely monitors international outbreaks of avian influenza. Biosecurity officers at airports and international mail centres are on high alert for bird and poultry products.

Birds, poultry meat and poultry products (including eggs, egg products, feathers, and vaccines) can carry diseases including avian influenza. These items can usually only be brought into the country if an import permit has been obtained before arrival. Items that do not have a permit will be seized and destroyed.

All incoming international mail is also subject to quarantine inspection. Incoming international passengers' baggage is x-rayed, inspected or checked by detector dogs for quarantine risk items.

The Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy and state and territory authorities run surveillance and public awareness programs.

For more detailed information

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources:

http://www.agriculture.gov.au/pests-diseases-weeds/protect-animal-plant/bird-owners/avian_influenza_bird_flu

Emergency pest and disease outbreaks (animals and plants): www.outbreak.gov.au

Animal Health Australia:
www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au

Public health information on avian influenza is available at:
www.health.gov.au