
HPAI confirmed in black vultures in Md.

Poultry producers encouraged to take precautions

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DOVER, Del. — Federal laboratory testing confirmed cases of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI) in samples taken from black vultures initially found sick and dead on April 22 in Harford County, Maryland. Following an investigation by the Maryland Departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MDA, DNR) and the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services, the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory [confirmed samples submitted from the dead birds tested positive for HPAI.](#)

These detections mark the Delmarva region's first confirmation of HPAI in wild birds since February 17, when the virus was found through wildlife surveillance in a [Canada goose in Kent County, Delaware.](#)

HPAI is known to be carried by wild birds, especially waterfowl, raptors, and vultures. Avian influenza is a highly contagious airborne respiratory virus that spreads quickly among birds through nasal and eye secretions and manure. As scavengers, vultures will feed on dead wildlife, including other wild birds. If they ingest the virus, they can get sick and die. It is believed the vultures contracted the virus from eating infected migratory bird species.

Even with the ongoing detections of HPAI in poultry and wild birds in the United States, continuing testing of people in close contact with infected poultry indicates a low risk to the general public's health. This H5N1 virus has not shown an ability to infect and be transmitted between people.

Avian influenza does not affect poultry meat or egg products, which remain safe to eat. Properly cooking poultry and eggs to 165 degrees Fahrenheit will kill viruses or bacteria.

Since the initial detection in Harford County, more than 100 black vultures have died from the disease. A total count cannot be confirmed because wild birds often get sick and die where people cannot see them. Black vultures are also known to fly long distances, which means infected vultures may die in other locations and transmit the virus to other birds, including poultry.

Six farms on Maryland's Eastern Shore and Delaware were identified as impacted by HPAI between [February 23](#) and [March 18, 2022](#). With the first confirmation in a commercial poultry farm, a state-federal response was initiated between the Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA), MDA, and USDA.

Considering the ongoing detections in the black vulture population, all poultry owners need to continue with increased vigilance in protecting their flocks from contracting avian influenza. Follow these steps to help manage wildlife and keep avian influenza off your farm:

- **Cover waste.** Keep mortality and compost piles covered at all times. The recommendation is one part mortalities to two parts litter, with birds in layers no more than 5 inches deep and not placed next to sidewalls. Cover mortalities daily with litter. If vultures are still an issue, cover the bins with netting or a screen.
- **Remove standing water adjacent to poultry houses.** Grade property to avoid pooling water. Fill or grade areas where water stands for more than 48 hours after heavy rainfall. Don't walk or move equipment through or near standing water – this could track wildlife fecal matter or other contaminants with the virus into your barns. Never use untreated surface water for watering birds, cleaning poultry barns, or other facilities.
- **Manage ponds and basins on poultry farms.** Prune or remove plants from banks of artificial water structures. Use wire grids, predator decoys, and scare devices to keep waterfowl away. Use fencing to separate natural ponds from the active area around barns.
- **Secure buildings.** Regularly check and repair damaged screens on windows and doors and holes in barn walls. Install netting or screens and use repellent gel or bird spikes to deter perching. Wash away or remove old nests before each nesting season. It is unlawful to remove nests with eggs or young birds in them.
- **Reduce food sources.** Don't feed wildlife. Remove spilled or uneaten feed immediately and ensure feed storage units are secure and free of holes. Wild birds can carry HPAI.
- **Use decoys.** Install decoys and scare devices and move them often so wildlife doesn't get used to them.

If you have sick poultry or experience increased mortality in your flock:

- Commercial poultry producers should contact the company they grow for when they notice signs of disease.
- Backyard flock owners who notice any signs of HPAI in their flock should contact:
 - In **Delaware**, email the Delaware Poultry Health Hotline at poultry.health@delaware.gov or call 302-698-4507 and provide your contact information, size of flock, location, and concerns.
 - In **Maryland**, report any unusual or sudden increases in sick birds to the MDA Animal Health Program at 410-841-5810. Commercial chicken growers and backyard flock owners can email questions about the outbreak to Birdflu@maryland.gov.

If you see sick or dead wild birds, **do not** handle or move them. Report any sick wild birds.

- For assistance in Maryland, call toll-free 1-877-463-6497. U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services operators are available from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, except on state holidays. For phone numbers outside of Maryland, please call 410-349-8055.
- For assistance in Delaware, please visit our [sick or dead wildlife reporting page](#) or call 302-739-9912 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. After hours, weekends, and state holidays, leave a message at 302-735-3600, Ext. 2.

For more information on avian influenza, visit <https://de.gov/poultry> or <https://mda.maryland.gov/avianflu>.

–Stacey Hofmann, Delaware Department of Agriculture