



NEWS RELEASE

Office of the Secretary

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Preliminary Testing Confirms Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Caroline County

ANNAPOLIS, MD (November 21, 2023)— State laboratory testing has detected a case of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI) in **Caroline County**. Following increased mortality of a broiler operation and investigation by the **Maryland Department of Agriculture**, it has been preliminarily confirmed that poultry from the affected farm has tested positive for HPAI.

State officials have quarantined all affected premises, and birds on the properties are being or have been depopulated to prevent the spread of the disease. Birds from affected flocks will not enter the food system.

Confirmation by the **U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratory** is pending with final results anticipated in the coming days.

"High Pathogenic Avian influenza or HPAI does not affect poultry meat or egg products, which remain healthy and safe to eat and handle. Poultry growers, operators, and backyard flock owners should be on high alert of the threat of HPAI," said Maryland Department of Agriculture Secretary Kevin Atticks. "The Maryland Department of Agriculture, local health department, USDA and partner organizations are working diligently to address the situation, including quarantining and testing nearby flocks."

Avian influenza is a highly contagious airborne respiratory virus that spreads easily among birds through nasal and eye secretions, as well as manure. The virus can be spread in various ways from flock to flock, including by wild birds, through contact with infected poultry, by equipment, and on the clothing and shoes of caretakers. This virus affects poultry, like chickens, ducks, and turkeys, along with some wild bird species such as ducks, geese, shorebirds, and raptors.

According to the **Maryland Department of Health**, the risk of transmission between birds and the general public is low.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture recommends the following common-sense biosecurity steps if HPAI is suspected on personal property, wild birds, or in a commercial operation.

- **Look for signs of illness.** Know the [warning signs](#) of infectious bird diseases.
- **Report suspected sick birds:**
- To report a possible case of HPAI call the Maryland Department of Agriculture at 410-841-5810.
- Commercial chicken growers and backyard flock owners can email questions about the outbreak to MD.Birdflu@maryland.gov.

Key biosecurity practices:

- Clean and disinfect transportation. Don't walk through or drive trucks, tractors, or equipment in areas where waterfowl or other wildlife feces may be. If you can't avoid this, clean your shoes, vehicle, and equipment thoroughly to prevent bringing disease agents back to your flock. This is especially important when visiting with farmers or those who hunt wild fowl such as when gathering at a local coffee shop, restaurant, or gas station.
- Remove loose feed. Don't give wild birds, rodents, and insects a free lunch. Remove spilled or uneaten feed right away, and make sure feed storage units are secure and free of holes. Wild birds can carry HPAI.
- Keep visitors to a minimum. Only allow those people who take care of your poultry to come in contact with your birds, including family and friends. Make sure everyone who has contact with your flock follows biosecurity principles.
- Wash your hands before and after coming in contact with live poultry. Wash with soap and water. If using a hand sanitizer, first remove manure, feathers, and other materials from your hands because disinfectants will not penetrate organic matter or caked-on dirt.
- Provide disposable boot covers (preferred) and/or disinfectant footbaths for anyone having contact with your flock. If using a footbath, be sure to remove all droppings, mud or debris from boots and shoes using a long-handled scrub brush BEFORE stepping into the disinfectant footbath, and always keep it clean.
- Change clothes before entering poultry areas and before exiting the property. Visitors should wear protective outer garments or disposable coveralls, boots, and headgear when handling birds, and shower and/or change clothes when leaving the facility.
- Clean and disinfect tools or equipment before moving them to a new poultry facility. Before allowing vehicles, trucks, tractors, or tools and equipment—including egg flats and cases that have come in contact with birds or their droppings—to exit the property, make sure they are cleaned and disinfected to prevent contaminated equipment from transporting disease. Do not move or reuse items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected—such as cardboard egg flats.

For more information on avian influenza,

visit: <https://mda.maryland.gov/Pages/AvianFlu.aspx>

Note to media: Due to biosecurity concerns, no on-site interviews, photos, or video are allowed. For all media requests, email: jessica.hackett2@maryland.gov.

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