Welsh Government
Avian Influenza - Questions & Answers

The purpose of this Q&A is to answer some of the more frequently asked questions by keepers of poultry and other captive birds.

General Advice

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza, or 'bird flu', is a contagious viral disease affecting the respiratory, digestive and/or nervous system of many species of birds. It can be spread from bird to bird by direct contact with infected body fluids, droppings and indirectly via contaminated boots, clothing, equipment etc.

What is the current situation in the UK?

In January 2018, there have been findings in England of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N6 in wild birds. In response to this, Defra introduced an ‘Avian Influenza Prevention Zone’ across the whole of England.

Following these findings a veterinary risk assessment for England and Wales stated that in light of the findings the risk level for disease being found in wild birds has increased from medium to high and the risk associated with direct and indirect transmission to poultry has also increased from low to medium.

As a precautionary measure, in response to the increased risk level, and to mitigate the risk of infection to poultry and other captive birds by wild birds, the Welsh Government declared an all Wales Avian Influenza Prevention Zone, which came into force on 00:01 on 25 January 2018.

The prevention zone places legal obligations on bird keepers across Wales to implement and adhere to additional biosecurity steps, in order to protect their birds and poultry and the national flock.

To date, there are no poultry outbreaks in the UK. Nor has there been any detection of the virus in wild birds in Wales.

Is there a risk to human health?

The risk to public health is regarded as low to very low. The Food Standards Agency has also offered reassurance that bird flu does not pose a food safety risk for UK consumers.

Will keepers of poultry and/or captive birds be compensated in any way?

No, the Welsh Government is not required to compensate keepers. The measures have been introduced as a precautionary approach to protect poultry and other captive birds from an incursion of avian influenza.
Wild Birds

Can injured wild birds still be treated, rehabilitated and released?
Yes, provided they have been assessed by a veterinary surgeon, are clear of any symptoms of Avian Influenza and are fit for release.

Is the disease being monitored in wild birds?
Yes, if you find any dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or gulls, or five or more dead wild birds of other species in the same location, you should report them to the Defra helpline on: 03459 33 55 77 or email: defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk. This service covers the whole of GB.

Not all birds may be used for testing but the location of where the dead birds are found will assist in to determining where testing is needed, so it is important that we gather this information.

Is it safe to feed wild birds?
You can feed wild birds, including ducks, but it's important to wash your hands thoroughly afterwards. Don't go near sick or dead birds. Keep away from bird droppings if possible and wash your hands thoroughly if you accidentally touch any. Further information is available on the NHS website here. If you keep poultry or captive birds at home, you should be aware of the risk associated with carrying contamination back to your birds.

Risk Assessment

How does this affect our risk assessment on the threat posed by bird flu?
The risk assessment suggests that there is now an increase in the likelihood of finding more cases in wild birds in England and Wales as a result of the latest finding in Hertfordshire, which increases this risk level to HIGH in comparison to the previous national risk of incursion level (MEDIUM).

The uncertainty around the length of time disease has been present and the probability of a greater geographical spread of infection in wild birds has increased the risk level for the direct and indirect exposure to poultry in England and Wales to MEDIUM although this will depend on the biosecurity level at the holding. Where strong biosecurity is implemented, the risk may be mitigated to LOW.

As the risk to poultry and kept birds will depend on the level of biosecurity on the premises and the likely contact between poultry or kept birds with wild birds, it is essential that all poultry and captive bird keepers remain vigilant and ensure they practice the highest standards of biosecurity.

The latest risk assessment for Avian Influenza is available here. This will be kept under review.
What about H5N8? Is H5N6 the key concern this year?

We are aware of this strain of avian influenza, H5N6 HPAI, which is causing outbreaks and the deaths of wild birds on the continent particularly in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. However, H5N8 HPAI (the strain which circulated last year and caused numerous outbreaks across Europe) is still present, and a further case of this strain cannot be ruled out.

Are you now expecting to find cases in other birds?

We currently regard the risk of bird flu occurring in the UK as high in wild birds, so further findings are possible, particularly in areas where many migratory species congregate. The Animal and Plant Health Agency and staff at the site will continue to monitor and the wild bird surveillance programme is underway.

If you find dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or other dead wild birds, such as gulls or birds of prey, you should report them to the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77. Make sure to wash your hands thoroughly with soap after coming into contact with any animal and do not touch any sick or dead birds. We will collect some of the reported birds and analyse them for avian influenza.

Is it likely that other birds will now catch bird flu?

Wild waterfowl migrate to the UK from other parts of Europe at this time of year to overwinter. The migration period begins each year in September and peak bird numbers are typically found in December and January. The birds will often still be present at overwintering sites until at least April. However other resident waterfowl or water birds (such as gulls, waders, herons and coots) may also become infected.

The risk to poultry on poultry farms will depend on the level of biosecurity on the farm and the likely contact between poultry and wild birds which is why it is essential that all poultry and captive bird keepers comply with the AIPZ and remain vigilant, ensuring they practice the highest standards of biosecurity.

All Wales Avian Influenza Prevention Zone

What is an ‘Avian Influenza Prevention Zone’?

We are introducing enhanced biosecurity measures within a H5N6 Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ). Within this zone keepers should:

- place birds’ food and water in fully enclosed areas protected from wild birds, and remove any spilled feed regularly
- minimise movement in and out of bird enclosures
- clean and disinfect footwear before and after visiting birds, using a Defra approved disinfectant at entrances and exits
- clean and disinfect vehicles and equipment that have come into contact with poultry
- keep areas where birds live clean and tidy, and regularly disinfect hard surfaces such as paths and walkways
- humanely control rats and mice
- keep birds separate from wildlife and wild waterfowl by putting suitable fencing around outdoor areas they access
• keep a close watch on birds for any signs of disease and report any very sick birds or unexplained deaths to your vet

Anyone who keeps more than 500 birds must take some extra biosecurity measures. They include identifying clearly defined areas where access by non-essential people and vehicles is restricted, and cleaning and disinfecting vehicles, equipment and footwear.

**What measures are you putting in place in the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone?**

Following the finding of bird flu in wild birds in Warwickshire, we extended our action to help prevent the virus spreading to poultry and other domestic birds.

Whether you keep just a few birds or thousands, you are now legally required to meet enhanced biosecurity requirements and this is in your interests to do, to protect your birds from this highly infectious virus.

All bird keepers in England and Wales are legally obliged comply with the following requirements:

• place birds’ food and water in fully enclosed areas protected from wild birds, and remove any spilled feed regularly
• minimise movement in and out of bird enclosures
• clean and disinfect footwear before and after visiting birds, using a Defra approved disinfectant at entrances and exits
• clean and disinfect vehicles and equipment that have come into contact with poultry
• keep areas where birds live clean and tidy, and regularly disinfect hard surfaces such as paths and walkways
• humanely control rats and mice
• keep birds separate from wildlife and wild waterfowl by putting suitable fencing around outdoor areas they access
• keep a close watch on birds for any signs of disease and report any very sick birds or unexplained deaths to your vet

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**How will you enforce this?**

Local Authorities have the responsibility to ensure compliance with the AIPZ. They have a proportionate approach to non-compliance in place.

**What’s the penalty for breaching the AIPZ requirements?**

Breach of the AIPZ is an offence. The maximum penalty for a breach of the requirements is an unlimited fine on summary conviction and up to 3 months’ imprisonment per offence.

**Why are you not doing a housing order?**

Expert scientific and veterinary advice on the current findings suggest the current level of threat from H5N6 is not as high now as during the outbreak of H5N8 bird flu during
2016/2017. We will continue to monitor the current situation and further decisions will be based upon the latest scientific evidence and veterinary advice.

Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer
Welsh Government