



Guidance for municipal staff handling bird mortalities

This guidance provides information to municipal staff to support them in the safe handling of bird mortalities received at landfills or transfer stations. Protecting human health and the environment is a high priority for the government and our partners involved in managing the Avian Influenza (AI) outbreak in British Columbia (B.C.).

What causes Avian Influenza (bird flu)? Do I need to be concerned?

Bird flu is caused by a virus. After a wild bird infects a farm-raised bird, the virus can easily and quickly spread among hundreds or thousands of birds on a farm. Sick birds must then be killed to stop the virus from spreading.

Avian influenza viruses usually do not infect humans and cannot spread easily from person-to-person. There have been rare human cases of the viruses. These cases are most often in people who had close, unprotected contact with infected poultry or were in environments heavily contaminated with the virus.

Bird flu virus can be passed through bird droppings and saliva on surfaces such as cages, tractors, and other farm equipment. You cannot get bird flu from eating fully cooked chicken, turkey, or duck, because heat kills the virus.

What are the symptoms?

At first, the symptoms of [bird flu](#) can be the same as common flu symptoms, such as:

- A fever.
- A cough.
- A sore throat.
- Muscle aches.

Sometimes bird flu can cause other symptoms, such as:

- Vomiting or diarrhea.
- An eye infection ([conjunctivitis](#)).

Bird flu can quickly progress to [pneumonia](#) and [acute respiratory distress syndrome](#), a serious lung problem that can be deadly. *Call your doctor right away if you have travelled somewhere or live in an area where there is bird flu, and you have a fever and a hard time breathing.*

How can my landfill safely manage bird mortalities?

Bird mortalities from an *uninfected premises are controlled waste*.

1. Check your landfill's policies to see if they accept mortalities as controlled waste. People should not bring bird mortalities to the landfill without prior assent from the landfill owner.
2. If you accept bird mortalities, write down the contact information for the person who brought in the waste. Other agencies may request the information.

Bird mortalities from an *infected premises are hazardous waste*.

1. If you want to dispose of hazardous waste in your landfill, contact the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. If you do not have a direct contact, use Authorizations.South@gov.bc.ca or Authorizations.North@gov.bc.ca

If it is unclear if waste is infected or you are providing guidance over the phone, consult the following guidance:

1. Check your landfill's policies to see if they accept mortalities as controlled waste. People should not bring bird mortalities to the landfill without prior assent from the landfill owner.
 - If you accept bird mortalities, write down the contact information for the person who brought in the waste. Other agencies may request the information.
2. Inform bird owners that they are legally responsible to notify authorities of serious bird diseases such as Avian Influenza (bird flu).
 - Bird owners can report suspicious bird deaths to their veterinarians or their nearest [Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(CFIA\) Animal Health office](#).
3. When advising on whether a bird owner should move their mortalities:
 - *For over-the-phone consultation:* Inform bird owners that they **should not** remove sick or dead birds off their property if it is suspected that the birds were infected with Avian Influenza.
 - Symptoms of Avian Influenza in birds can be found on the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's (the ministry) [Avian Influenza \(gov.bc.ca\) webpage](#).
 - Questions about the movement of birds can be directed to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food at 604-855-8255. Support is available every day from 8:30am to 4:30pm (PDT).
 - If they have found a dead wild bird, they should contact the Wild Bird Mortality Investigation Program hotline at 1-866-431-2473.
 - *For in-person consultation when the mortalities are present:* Inform bird owners that in the future, they should not remove sick or dead birds off their property if it is suspected that the birds were infected with Avian Influenza.
 - Segregate the waste and keep it on-site; it is best not to move suspect infected waste to minimize disease transmission.

- As soon as possible, contact either the nearest [CFIA Animal Health office](#) (for domestic birds) or the Wild Bird Mortality Investigation Program hotline at 1-866-431-2473 (for wild birds) to determine if the waste should be sampled.

What steps can I take to reduce the transmission of Avian Influenza and protect myself from potential exposure?

You may be exposed to bird mortalities while working at a landfill or transfer station. When handling bird carcasses, take precautions to protect yourself and prevent the spread of Avian Influenza.

- Have the waste double-bagged in sealed, 6 mil plastic bags (if possible).
- Segregate the waste and keep it on-site; it is best not to move suspect infected waste to minimize disease transmission.
- Wear personal protective equipment (i.e., masks and gloves) while handling poultry carcasses.
- Take all necessary precautions to prevent vectors (i.e., scavenging animals) from accessing the waste.

For more information about the ministry's and CFIA's Avian Influenza response: [Avian Influenza \(gov.bc.ca\)](#) or [Avian influenza \(bird flu\) - Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(canada.ca\)](#).