



## Guidance for meat processors handling bird mortalities

This guidance is intended for people who work closely with bird and bird by-products in meat processing facilities such as abattoirs and slaughter establishments.

### What is 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 cases of humans infected with avian influenza – only a few hundred people are known to have been sick with bird flu. 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.*

## **Will an annual flu vaccination prevent me from getting bird flu?**

If you often handle birds, you should consider getting an annual vaccination against seasonal human influenza. This vaccination will not protect you against bird flu, but it will reduce the likelihood that you will become infected with both human and bird flu strains at the same time. This will limit the chance of the flu viruses mixing to create a new strain of flu virus to which people have little or no immunity.

Find a flu clinic near you: <https://immunizebc.ca/clinics/flu>

## **Is an Avian Influenza Infected Premises allowed to process their birds through my facility?**

In Canada, highly pathogenic avian influenza and low pathogenicity H5 and H7 avian influenza viruses are considered to be Notifiable Avian Influenza, which is a [reportable disease](#) under the *Health of Animals Act*. **Producers are legally obligated to inform either their [local CFIA Animal Health Office](#) or veterinarian if they suspect their birds may be infected with Avian Influenza.**

Avian Influenza Infected Premises (IP) are placed under quarantine by the CFIA upon designation as a high-risk Suspect Premises. This means the owner is:

- Required to implement biosecurity measures focused on preventing access to sick birds or contaminated areas;
- Requested to control access to the property with closure of gates, etc. where possible;
- Requested to place signage indicating restricted access (not that it is an IP) to the property.

CFIA maintains information on [the status of ongoing avian influenza response in BC](#), as well as an [interactive map](#) which allows you to view the general area around an IP is also available.

Avian Influenza infected bird mortalities are considered [hazardous waste](#) under the *Environmental Management Act*. Producers have several options to dispose of hazardous waste including:

- Disposal at a Landfill (small volumes)
- On-Farm Composting or Burial
- Burning or Incineration

## **Watch for symptoms of Avian Influenza in live birds before slaughter and during handling of live birds.**

Some or all of the following clinical signs are evident in infected birds:

- a drop in production of eggs, many of which are soft-shelled or shell-less
- diarrhea
- haemorrhages on the hock
- high and sudden mortality rate
- quietness and extreme depression
- swelling of the skin under the eyes
- wattles and combs become swollen and congested

The signs of Avian Influenza are very similar to those seen with [Velogenic Newcastle Disease](#) and other poultry diseases.

## **How can my meat processing facility reduce health risks for my staff?**

When handling bird mortalities from uninfected premises, refer to your company's standard health and safety guidelines.

We encourage staff not to handle sick birds or birds that have died from unknown causes. If you are handling and/or cleaning bird mortalities from a site where it is unclear whether the mortalities are infected with Avian Influenza:

- Minimize direct contact with blood, feces/droppings, and respiratory secretions of all birds;
- Always work in a well-ventilated environment. If you are working outdoors, try to stay upwind of birds to avoid inhaling dust, feathers and aerosols;
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling birds;
- As much as possible, wear personal protection equipment (PPE) including face masks, goggles, gloves (i.e., vinyl, latex, nitrile, rubber) and boots;
- Avoid touching your face or rubbing your eyes with unwashed hands;
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water immediately after you have finished. If you do not have access to water, use hand sanitizer or wipe with at least 60% alcohol;
- After you are done cleaning birds, wash knives, tools, work surfaces and other equipment with soap and warm water followed by a household disinfectant or bleach solution (25ml bleach to 2L water);
- Immediately remove and wash and/or change clothing and footwear that may be contaminated with blood, feces/droppings or respiratory secretions. Store dirty shoes and clothing in a sealed plastic bag until they can be washed;

If you become sick while handling birds or shortly afterwards, see your doctor right away. Tell your doctor that you have been in close contact with birds.

### **Additional Health Information:**

- [Avian Influenza and Poultry](#) (Health Canada)
- [Human Health Issues Related to Avian Influenza in Canada](#) (Public Health Agency of Canada)
- [HealthLinkBC's Avian Influenza \(Bird Flu\) webpage](#)