

Avian Influenza and Bird Exhibitions

Fact Sheet



Ohio Department
of Agriculture



Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza —also called the avian flu – is an extremely contagious virus that primarily affects domestic poultry and is likely spread by wild, migrating birds. The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) first confirmed the virus in the U.S. beginning in late 2014. Throughout the spring and summer of 2015 more than 48 million birds were affected, leading the Ohio Department of Agriculture to prohibit all gatherings of birds for show or for sale in the state until the threat of an outbreak had passed.

With no confirmed cases in Ohio and no immediate threat of a Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (avian flu) outbreak, the Ohio Department of Agriculture rescinded the order prohibiting bird shows on December 17, 2015. However, poultry and bird owners must remain vigilant and cautious in order to protect the health of their flocks during migration seasons.

Outbreak over, but precautions still necessary

On November 18, the World Organization for Animal Health (known as the OIE) issued its final report on the deadly avian influenza outbreaks that resulted in the loss of more than 48 million chickens and turkeys across the United States. The report declares that the outbreaks in 15 affected states are now final, closed, and resolved and the agency allows the U.S. to declare itself free of avian influenza.

However, Ohio’s poultry flocks will continue to be vulnerable during the migration seasons in the spring and fall, so owners should continue to practice strict biosecurity and take active steps to keep their flocks disease-free.

Acquiring healthy birds

An important factor in maintaining flock health is sourcing and raising healthy birds. Birds that are intended for exhibition should always be sourced from a National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) flock and should not co-mingle with birds that came from uncertified sources. It is also important to keep birds away from wild waterfowl.

Buying birds from a show or swap meet does increase the possibility of unintentionally spreading disease, so birds that are not directly sourced from NPIP flocks should be isolated on the property for several weeks, to ensure they are not showing signs of illness, before they are introduced into a flock.

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Biosecurity recommendations for poultry owners

All bird owners, whether commercial producers or backyard enthusiasts, should continue to practice good biosecurity, prevent contact between their birds and wild birds, keep birds inside as much as possible, and report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to their veterinarian immediately.

Good biosecurity practices for poultry owners include the following:

- Monitor flocks for unusual signs of illness such as “snicking” (sneezing), a 1 percent or more decrease in egg production, or an increase in mortality. Other signs to look for are wheezing, lethargy, and depression.
- Practice personal biosecurity and avoid contact with sick/dead poultry or wildlife. If contact occurs, wash your hands with soap and water and change clothing before having any contact with healthy domestic poultry and birds.
- Keep unauthorized visitors from having contact with poultry, a good practice whether or not there is a disease threat. Authorized persons should be required to wear protective clothing and shoes before entering a commercial poultry house.
- Avoid contact between your birds and wild birds whenever possible due to the migratory nature of HPAI. These virus strains can travel in wild birds without them appearing sick.
- Clean and disinfect farm vehicles or equipment before moving them on and off your property.

Sick birds or unusual bird deaths should also be immediately reported to the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Division of Animal Health at 1-614-728-6220 or through the USDA APHIS toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593. Additional information on biosecurity from USDA APHIS for backyard flocks can be found at <http://healthybirds.aphis.usda.gov> or by visiting www.ohioagriculture.gov.

Ohio’s role in national egg production

Ohio is the second largest egg producer in the country and home to 28 million laying chickens, 12 million broilers, 8.5 million pullets and 2 million turkeys. Ohio’s egg, chicken and turkey farms create more than 14,600 jobs and contribute \$2.3 billion to the state’s economy.