

# About Avian Influenza

## How to spot avian influenza

There are 2 types of avian influenza. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is the more serious type. It is often fatal in birds. The main clinical signs of HPAI in birds are:

- swollen head
- blue discolouration of neck and throat
- loss of appetite
- respiratory distress such as gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling
- diarrhoea
- fewer eggs laid
- increased mortality

Clinical signs can vary between species of bird and some species may show minimal clinical signs (ducks and geese).

Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) is usually less serious. It can cause mild breathing problems, but affected birds will not always show clear signs of infection.

The severity of LPAI depends on the type of bird and whether it has any other illnesses.

Anyone who keeps poultry must keep a close watch on them for any signs of disease, and must seek prompt advice from their vet if they have any concerns.

## How Avian Influenza is spread

The disease spreads from bird to bird by direct contact or through contaminated body fluids and faeces. It can also be spread by contaminated feed and water or by dirty vehicles, clothing and footwear.

The avian influenza virus changes frequently, creating new strains, and there is a constant risk that one of the new strains may spread easily among people. But there is no evidence that any recent strain of avian influenza has been able to spread directly between people.

Avian influenza is not an airborne disease.

## Advice for the public

Some strains of avian influenza can pass to humans, but this is very rare. It usually requires very close contact between the human and infected birds. Based on what is known about the H5N8 strain, the risk to public health is considered very low.

There have never been any recorded cases of H5N8 in humans. More information on [avian influenza in people](#) is available from your relevant public health authority.

The *Food Standards Agency* advises that bird flu does not pose a food safety risk for UK consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

If you employ people who work with poultry or work with poultry yourself, you can also read [Health and Safety Executive advice on protecting workers from avian influenza](#).

## Wild birds

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 by calling Defra's national helpline: **03459 33 55 77**.

By collecting and testing those birds, the Government can better understand how the disease is distributed geographically and identify the species affected.

APHA (Animal and Plant Health Agency) publish a report (updated regularly) on [findings of highly pathogenic avian influenza](#) (bird flu) H5N8 in wild birds in Great Britain.

## Further information

Visit the websites below:

England [www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu)

Wales

<http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/ahw/disease/avianflu/?lang=en>

Scotland [www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza](http://www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza)

Northern Ireland <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/avian-influenza-ai>

They have also produced the following GB guidance document: [Biosecurity and preventing disease in captive birds](#)

See the DEFRA advice sheet [How to Keep your Birds Safe](#) (whilst the sheet has been produced for use in England, the principals within it are universal in terms of biosecurity of poultry).

**Source:** [www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu#about-avian-influenza](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu#about-avian-influenza)