

Protect your Flocks from Avian Influenza -

A potentially harmful virus called avian influenza has been detected in many states this spring, including Kansas and surrounding states. The virus has been confirmed in wild birds in Kansas, and at least one small poultry flock. The virus has been isolated in waterfowl, wild birds, small farms, and commercial operations. Data indicates that the virus is probably moving with the aid of the spring migration of waterfowl as the weather begins to warm. To protect your birds, now is the time to keep as much distance as possible from migrating ducks and geese.

This current outbreak is in a form that is more concerning than many. It is being referred to as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). This term means it is highly contagious and can infect chickens, turkeys, gamebirds, and other birds and can cause severe illness and/or sudden death.

As widespread as it now is across the nation, poultry owners should assume the virus is likely present all around and begin an immediate biosecurity program. Backyard flocks are susceptible to this virus as well. There is no licensed and approved vaccine for use against avian influenzas in poultry in the US. The best way to protect your birds is to practice good biosecurity.

Monitor your birds for symptoms including sneezing or wheezing, coughing, nasal discharge, facial swellings, and other signs of respiratory struggle, like gasping for air. Look for a lack of energy, movement, and reduced appetite. Infected layers may suddenly lay fewer eggs that are misshapen. The birds may appear to have incoordination and diarrhea. Be on the lookout for sudden death in birds even if they aren't showing other symptoms.

If you are able, while birds are migrating through, keep your flock indoors or undercover. The biggest risk to a small farm is waterfowl and wild birds that stop by to steal feed or water and mix with your birds while feeding. You must keep waterfowl far from your birds. The virus can also spread from passing waterfowl to local birds that do not migrate.

If you have a pond that is attracting the migrating birds, then stay away, and keep your pets away as well. Expect the pressure to seek water from your property to be stronger in the Midwest and West this year as moisture levels have been low.

Eliminate roosting birds like starlings and pigeons if you have them. Now is the time to stop attracting wild birds with feeders. There is data that suggests that the well-intended feeding of wild birds could lead to a concentration of birds that allows rapid spread of diseases during an outbreak. Wild birds are starting to build spring nests, and these should be removed from coops and barns. Wear gloves and a mask to reduce your exposure to mites and other diseases these nests may harbor. Never place a bird house near your poultry. Light anti-bird netting can be used to keep the birds from building nests, and nets over pens can keep wild birds from entering your coop.

Many small flocks leave feeders full of grain all day and night in the coop. This is never a good idea because many rodents and small mammals visit at night to steal a meal and spread droppings that may contain diseases. A good way to feed birds is to determine how much they will clean up during the day, and feed only this amount every morning. By roosting time, the feeders should be empty. It is even better to pull up the feeder and store it in a rodent proof tub overnight.

Good biosecurity includes other important prevention strategies. You can make an emergency footbath by using a half cup of bleach in a gallon of water, then placing this in a shallow container to step in when

entering your bird coop. Don't visit other flocks. Auctions, shows and swaps will be at risk during this time. Purchase chicks from only a tested source. Though most mail order hatcheries are monitored, there is still a small risk of infection. Stop purchase of hatching eggs and chicks from small internet sellers of stock that are not monitored. Some offers will say that their birds are tested, but this likely refers to *Salmonella pullorum* because most small flocks are not required to be tested for avian influenzas like commercial poultry.

Gamebird operations should be alert as well. Netted flight pens are subject to pressure from wild birds and waterfowl the same as small poultry farms. Commercial gamebird farms should not be located near water sources where waterfowl stop. Any method of keeping the waterfowl away from the flight pens should be implemented immediately. If an ATV is used on the farm, it should be decontaminated by washing and applying disinfectant before getting it close to the pens. It is still early spring, so most pheasant operations have not released started chicks to the flight pens. If you are able, try to hold the chicks back in the brooder house as long as possible to give yourself more time for the migrating birds to clear.

Now is the time to be neighbor friendly and stay away from other poultry farms. Commercial poultry farms are highly invested in poultry production so being a good neighbor by staying off their premises during this time is helpful. Many producers enjoy giving educational tours of their farm, but all tours should stop until this threat subsides. Most commercial farms never welcome visitors because this is part of their biosecurity programs.

Even the best prevention plan will not prevent all cases of avian influenza. The Kansas Department of Agriculture is a good source of current testing results and contacts for potential problems. If your birds have symptoms of HPAI, contact your veterinarian or call KDA toll-free at 833-765-2006, or contact them via email at KDA.HPAI@ks.gov.