

# What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza (AI) - the bird flu—is a virus that infects wild birds and domestic poultry.

There is a flu for birds just as there is for humans, and as with people, some forms of the flu are worse than others.



AI viruses can be classified as highly pathogenic (HPAI) or low pathogenic (LPAI) strains based on the severity of the illness they cause.

Most AI viruses are LPAI and typically cause little or no clinical signs in infected birds. However, some LPAI virus strains are capable of mutating under field conditions into HPAI viruses.

HPAI viruses, which are often fatal in chickens and turkeys, can strike poultry with out any warning signs. Once established, the disease can spread rapidly from flock to flock. It is essential for Alabama poultry owners to be alert to this disease threat.

## INTRODUCTION & SPREAD

International movement of poultry, equipment and people has increased the risk of introducing HPAI into the US. Birds exposed to migratory waterfowl are at increased risk for contracting the avian influenza virus.

Once introduced into a flock, HPAI can spread from bird to bird by direct contact or by mechanical transmission via manure, equipment, vehicles, egg flats and crates. Employees and visitors can also carry the virus on contaminated clothing and shoes.

**Just one gram of contaminated manure can contain enough virus to infect 1 million birds!**

Migratory waterfowl have proved to be a natural reservoir for the AI virus.



## CLINICAL SIGNS

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production
- Soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of head, eyelids, comb, wattles and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, comb and legs
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing, sneezing
- Incoordination

## POTENTIAL DANGER TO HUMAN HEALTH

Of all the strains of HPAI virus ever isolated, only one has been shown under natural conditions to be infectious to people, H5N1.

The concern about public health<sup>1</sup> relates to the potential for the virus to mutate into a form that could spread from person to person, a characteristic that could result in a human influenza pandemic. **There is no evidence that this is occurring. Strains of AI that have been detected in US poultry, including LPAI and HPAI, have caused no known human illness.**

While infection of people can be considered a rare event, all poultry personnel should wear adequate safety equipment to protect themselves, such as boots, coveralls, gloves, face masks and headgear, and follow appropriate biosecurity procedures when on premises know or suspected to be infected with HPAI.



## Biosecurity Measures

Poultry Producers and flock owners should always follow sound biosecurity practices to prevent the introduction of Avian Influenza or any disease into their flocks. Among the recommendations:

- Keep an all-in/all-out philosophy of flock management
- Keep your distance (restrict access to your property and your birds?)
- Keep it clean (thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment and the tires and undercarriages of vehicles entering or leaving the premises.)
- Do not bring disease home (Do no loan or borrow equipment or vehicles from other farms. If you must visit another farm or livestock market, change footwear and clothing before working your own flocks)
- Provide clean clothing and disinfection facilities for your employees
- **Protect poultry flocks from coming in contact with wild or migratory birds, and keep poultry away from any source of water that may have been contaminated by wild birds.**
- Do not bring birds onto your farm unless you know the health status of the flock of origin
- Quarantine any new additions for 21 days before introducing them to your flock
- **DO NOT WAIT! Report any suspicious signs or symptoms in your birds immediately.**

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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## ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & INDUSTRIES



## AVIAN INFLUENZA

### A Threat to Alabama Poultry





## Avian Influenza (AI) - What Poultry Growers Need to Know

**DEFINITIONS:** AI is a virus disease of poultry. AI can be of low pathogenicity (LPAI), causing mild disease and mortality. There are different strains of AI viruses: examples are H1N1 and H5N2. Some AI viruses can mutate and become HPAI viruses.

**WHAT ARE THE CLINICAL SIGNS (SYMPTOMS) OF AI?** LPAI in chickens and turkeys resembles other mild respiratory disease (noise, swollen faces, conjunctivitis). In breeders it can also cause a production drop and birds may produce soft shelled eggs. With HPAI, the birds may become very quiet, not eat or drink, have diarrhea, and discolored combs and feet. Birds may also die suddenly without any signs of disease.

**WHERE DOES AI VIRUS COME FROM?** Natural carriers are wild birds, especially waterfowl. Swine are sometimes infected with influenza viruses. Influenza viruses may change and adapt to infect different mammals and birds, including humans.

**HOW CAN IT BE SPREAD?** HPAI can be spread from bird to bird by direct contact or by manure, equipment, vehicles, etc. Employees and visitors can also carry the virus on contaminated clothing and shoes.

**DO WE HAVE AI IN OUR STATE?** We do not have AI in poultry in our state but are continuously monitoring for it.



### **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP PREVENT YOUR FARM FROM BECOMING INFECTED WITH AVIAN INFLUENZA?**

- 1. ALWAYS use dedicated footwear or use provided foot baths or boot wash to go into the poultry house.**
- 2. Do not let poultry drink untreated surface water (from lakes, streams, ponds, or rivers).**
- 3. Clean up all outside feed spills promptly.**
- 4. Bird proof houses; do not let wild birds nest close by.**
- 5. Do not let waterfowl become residents on nearby ponds.**
- 6. Dispose of all mortality completely and promptly.**
- 7. Do not enter your poultry house directly after hunting or after contact with ANY birds, including those from pet shops, zoos, live bird markets, or people's backyards.**
- 8. Do not come into contact with your poultry after visiting birds in another country.**