

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

251 Causeway Street, Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114
617-626-1700 fax: 617-626-1850 www.mass.gov/agr



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Governor

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October 2, 2015

Avian Influenza Alert: Backyard Bird Biosecurity and Illness Reporting

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) has been working with its sister agencies and federal partners on establishing an emergency response plan for the introduction of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Since mid-December 2014, there have been several ongoing HPAI incidents along the Pacific, Central and Mississippi Flyways. Due to the mixing of birds from different flyways up through Canada, it is likely that exposed birds will be found in the Atlantic Flyway during the current southern migration. This strain of the HPAI virus devastated the domestic poultry population in 21 Midwestern and Western states over the past year. It has not been found to affect humans. Ongoing, routine testing of wild birds and domestic poultry is being conducted and to date no HPAI has been found within Massachusetts. MDAR is seeking to educate poultry owners about the risk this virus poses to their birds in hopes that owners will take every precaution to prevent their flocks from being exposed. Additionally, the MDAR wants poultry owners to understand what will happen if their flock becomes infected.

HPAI is a deadly disease for poultry. It can infect all types of chickens, turkeys and many other kinds of birds. HPAI can strike suddenly and spread fast. Infected poultry may die within hours of becoming infected. The virus can be spread by contact with infected birds or contaminated materials.

There are a few simple steps bird owners can take to try to protect their flocks from avian influenza:

- Wild migratory birds are natural carriers for HPAI. Preventing wild birds from mixing with domestic flocks is essential to disease control. Poultry owners should assure their birds are kept away from wild birds, particularly waterfowl.
- Avoid unnecessary movement of poultry between locations and be aware of the potential to carry HPAI contaminated materials onto properties where birds are kept.
- New birds should be completely isolated for at least one month prior to being added into the flock. Birds that are returning home from fairs or shows should also be isolated from the home flock as if they were new arrivals.
- Limit the number of people that have access to your flock.
- Do not share equipment with other bird owners without thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting between locations.
- Create a written biosecurity plan by actually writing down the precautions you take. This will allow others to take the same precautions should someone else need to care for your birds.

The USDA takes the threat of HPAI very seriously. Sick birds produce a lot of virus, and quickly putting down infected and exposed birds can drastically reduce the spread of disease. The USDA has set a goal of depopulating any infected flock within 24 hours of virus detection. A program has been established by the USDA to compensate flock owners for any animals depopulated as part of the control efforts. This reimbursement does not apply to birds that die of the disease, so it is essential that flock owners notify the Department immediately upon signs of trouble. Owners of fancy or exotic birds should keep receipts and sales records that will help establish the value of your flock.

Although many strains of avian influenza can cause varying degrees of illness including respiratory illness, decreased feed consumption or decreased egg production, this particular outbreak has generally caused birds to die without any other signs of illness. Any unexpected deaths or other signs should be reported immediately to the Division of Animal Health (617-626-1795). Increased numbers of wild bird deaths should be reported to the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (508-389-6300). Prompt reporting will expedite rapid testing and diagnosis.

An Avian Influenza FAQ was developed by the MA Departments of Agricultural Resources, Public Health, and Environmental Protection, in conjunction with federal and local partners:

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/id/epidemiology/cdc-animals-pet-safety.html>.