



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

## Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

### *What recreational shooters need to know!*

#### What is avian influenza or bird flu?

Avian influenza (AI) is a highly contagious viral infection of birds. Some avian influenza viruses, called 'highly pathogenic avian influenza' (HPAI) viruses, can cause sudden, high mortality (up to 100%) in domestic fowl (chickens) and turkeys.

The H5N1 strain of the virus has recently spread from Asia to India and Eastern Europe and is of high concern to Australia.

#### What species of birds are susceptible to the virus?

Avian influenza can infect a wide range of birds including, ducks, geese, ibis, swans, chickens, turkeys, pheasants, partridges, quail, pigeons, guinea fowl and ostriches.

#### How do I know if a bird has avian influenza?

The disease can be recognised in birds such as chickens. Clinical signs are variable but commonly they include a sudden drop in egg production, loss of appetite, diarrhoea and death. The signs vary depending on the strain of the virus and the age and species of the birds infected.

Many species of wild birds, especially waterfowl, **carry the virus but generally show no signs** of disease. Australia does not have migratory waterfowl with known flyways. The risk of waterfowl catching AI is posed when they mingle with shore birds and waders that come to Australia from Asia.

#### How does it effect humans?

H5N1 can infect humans who come in very close contact with infected birds or their excrement. People **do not** get infected with AI through eating cooked chicken meat and eggs. It is important to know that freezing poultry **does not kill the virus**. The virus can survive in bird excrement for over a month and can survive in water for many days, if not weeks, depending on temperature.

Clinical signs and symptoms of AI in humans include fever, sore throat, respiratory distress, pneumonia and in some cases death.

#### Does Australia have avian influenza?

Australia is currently free of avian influenza. There have been five cases of bird flu in commercial poultry previously in Australia. All were the H7 subtype of the virus which can be a fatal disease to chickens. All five cases were successfully contained and eradicated with the last case being in 1997 at Tamworth in NSW. There were no known cases of human infection.



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One possible scenario of bird flu coming to Australia is through migratory birds. One of Australia's best defences is for recreational shooters, bush walkers and others such as poultry owners to be vigilant and report any unusual signs in birds immediately.

People who own domestic or commercial birds must also play their part by maintaining strict biosecurity measures - this includes keeping wild birds away from feed and water supplies as well as adopting good hygiene such as disinfection.

#### What should I do if I see something unusual in wild birds?

If you come across a large number of dead birds or any other circumstances that look unusual, you should not handle the birds without the proper personal protection equipment. You should then take immediate action! Telephone the toll free **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline** on **1800 675 888**. Alternatively, contact the Department of Primary Industries or Agriculture in your state or territory or tell your local veterinarian.



Disease investigation in wild ducks  
Photo courtesy of Taronga Zoo

**Remember**, a quick response to a disease outbreak is our best chance of containing and eradicating it. No matter how insignificant your find is, be safe rather than sorry and **report it!**

#### Are there precautions I can take to protect myself from being infected?

Yes. It is recommended that if handling wild birds, you practise good hygiene. This includes using gloves, a face mask and also disinfecting hands, clothing and any equipment that comes into contact with birds.

There is a range of comprehensive personal protection equipment information on the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) website [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au) (Prepared and Protected Resources). If you do not have access to a computer or the internet contact DoHA on the toll free telephone number **1800 004 599**.

#### Want more information?

The Department of Primary Industries or Agriculture in your state or territory will be able to provide you with information that is relevant to your region.

Alternatively, the following websites provide a wealth of information and provide links to state and territory websites as well as reputable international websites.

[www.daff.gov.au/birdflu](http://www.daff.gov.au/birdflu)

[www.outbreak.gov.au](http://www.outbreak.gov.au)

[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

[www.who.int](http://www.who.int)