

Avian Influenza FAQs

1. What is avian influenza (AI)?

Avian influenza (AI) is an infectious disease of birds caused by type A strains of the influenza virus. It affects domestic poultry such as chickens, turkeys and ducks. The H5N2 strain, the sub-type found throughout the Midwest in recent weeks, is considered highly pathogenic (HPAI) for chickens, turkeys and ducks. Pathogenicity refers to the ability of the virus to produce disease.

H5N2 is an extremely contagious, multi-organ systemic disease leading to high and quick mortality of commercial poultry, typically 100% of a flock, often within 48 hours. While H5N2 quickly kills commercial poultry once it gets into a contained area or barn, the identified strain are not considered a threat to human health. Diseased animals do not enter the food supply. The disease itself is not carried in eggs, chicken or turkey.

2. What is the risk to humans?

Environmental Risks

The United States has the strongest Avian Influenza (AI) surveillance program in the world. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Iowa Department of Public Health considers the risk to be low to people from these HPAI H5 infections in wild birds, backyard flocks and commercial poultry. No human infections with the virus have ever been detected.

Since AI can travel in wild birds without those birds appearing sick, people should avoid contact with sick/dead poultry or wildlife. If contact occurs, wash your hands with soap and water and change clothing.

Hunters also should be careful about good hygiene, particularly in areas currently infected by HPAI. They should follow these practices to help limit any potential spread of the disease:

- Handle dead birds with proper protection such as gloves (or plastic bags or other forms of hand protection).
- Recognize that one important indicator of AI's possible presence is multiple deaths of birds in or close to the same location.
- Report any suspicious or large numbers of deaths of birds to veterinary authorities who, in turn, can arrange for the transport of the carcasses to laboratories for analysis

Food Safety

There is no food safety risk for consumers. Chickens, turkeys and other poultry infected with bird flu will be destroyed and will not enter the food supply. Poultry on affected farms are prohibited from being processed or sold. The pasteurization process kills HPAI, destroying the virus and making shell eggs safe to enter the food system. They are turned into dried egg whites for commercial uses.

Avian influenza cannot be transmitted through safely handled and properly cooked eggs, chicken or turkey. As a reminder, however, all eggs, chicken and turkey should be cooked thoroughly and at the recommended temperatures to reduce the risk of food-borne illnesses. You should continue safe food handling such as keeping meat refrigerated until ready to cook, keeping raw meat separate from other foods, washing work surfaces after handling raw meat, thoroughly cooking meat and keeping it hot and refrigerating leftovers immediately.

3. How serious is the outbreak in Iowa?

On Friday, May 1, 2015, Iowa Governor Terry E. Branstad declared a state of emergency in Iowa given the avian influenza outbreak. The announcement allows authorities to enforce preventive measures, test and monitor as needed and to create various restrictions in areas impacted by H5N2. Iowa was the third state in the Midwest to have an emergency declaration related to the avian influenza.

The proclamation of disaster emergency can be read below.

For additional information on the role of several state agencies' roles in dealing with this situation, check here: <https://governor.iowa.gov/2015/05/branstad-northey-provide-update-on-avian-influenza-in-iowa-branstad-declares-state-of>

1. Activates the disaster response and recovery aspect of the Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department's (HSEMD) Iowa Emergency Response Plan.
2. Authorizes the use and deployment of all available state resources, supplies, equipment, and materials as are deemed reasonably necessary by the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) and Iowa HSEMD in order to do the following:
 - A. Track and monitor instances of confirmed highly pathogenic avian influenza throughout the state of Iowa and the country,
 - B. Establish importation restrictions and prohibitions in respect to animals suspected of suffering from this disease,
 - C. Rapidly detect any presumptive or confirmed cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza within Iowa's borders,
 - D. Contain the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza within our state through depopulation, disinfections, and disposal of livestock carcasses,
 - E. Engage in detection activities, contact tracking, and other investigatory work to stop the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza within our state, and
 - F. Eliminate the disease in those disaster counties where it has been found and lessen the risk of this disease spreading to our state as a whole.
3. Temporarily authorizes the Iowa HSEMD, the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT), the Iowa Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH), other state agencies, and local law enforcement agencies and private contractors employed by the same to remove and/or dispose of live animals and animal carcasses on publicly or privately owned land when those live animals and/or carcasses threaten public health or safety.
4. Authorizes the Iowa HSEMD, the Iowa DOT, the Iowa DPS, the Iowa DNR, IDPH, other state agencies, and local law enforcement agencies to implement stop movement and stop loading restrictions and other control zone measures as are reasonably deemed necessary, including establishing buffer zones, checkpoints, and cleaning and disinfecting operations at checkpoints and borders surrounding any quarantine areas established by the IDALS or at any other location in the state of Iowa, in order to stop the spread of this contagious disease.
5. Authorizes state agencies to assist the IDALS in disinfection, depopulation, and livestock carcass disposal efforts.
6. Temporarily waives restrictions to allow for the timely and efficient disposal of poultry carcasses.
7. Temporarily suspends the regulatory provisions pertaining to hours of service for commercial vehicle drivers hauling poultry carcasses infected with or exposed to highly pathogenic avian influenza or while hauling loads otherwise related to the response to this disaster during its duration, subject to certain conditions outlined in the disaster proclamation.

4. What is the source of the avian influenza outbreaks? How did HPAI get into Iowa?

Scientists and agricultural experts believe the droppings of migratory birds are the cause. Iowa is in the Mississippi flyway, a migratory route commonly used by North American waterfowl, including wild ducks, geese, swans, gulls and shorebirds such as herons and egrets. While wild birds can carry many subtypes of avian influenza viruses, they rarely show disease or mortality. H5N2 is unprecedented in that it had not been found before in North America even after years of wild bird surveillance.

5. How is avian influenza transmitted within a farm?

Exactly how highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is initially introduced into poultry flocks remains unclear. Avian influenza is most often spread by contact between infected birds and healthy birds. It may also be spread indirectly through contact with contaminated equipment and materials. In birds, avian influenza is believed to be spread by contact with fecal droppings or respiratory secretions of infected birds. The virus can also be spread by objects such as shoes, clothing or equipment contaminated with the virus.

6. What preventive and biosecurity steps should egg-related farmers take?

America's egg farmers understand and share consumers' concerns about AI. Together with turkey and chicken producers, egg farmers have put comprehensive measures in place to limit the spread of avian influenza. Turkey and chicken producers as well as egg farmers already have comprehensive measures in place to limit the spread of avian influenza. Follow these rigorous biosecurity guidelines:

- **Work closely with animal health experts and veterinarians to monitor flocks** for unusual signs of illness such as "snicking" (sneezing), a one percent or more decrease in egg production, or an increase in mortality. Other signs to look for are wheezing, lethargy, and depression.
- Restrict on-farm access to essential employees only.
- **Practice personal biosecurity** and avoid contact with sick/dead poultry or wildlife. If contact occurs, wash your hands with soap and water and change clothing before having any contact with healthy domestic poultry and birds.
- Follow on-farm disinfecting procedures such as the use of foot baths.
- Clean and disinfect farm vehicles and equipment coming in and out of the area.
- Limit movement between farm operations.
- Requiring protective gear be used at all times for anyone who enters egg farms.

The Iowa Poultry Association and Iowa Egg Council reminds all poultry owners, even those who own a single bird in the backyard, from chickens to turkeys to ducks, to attentively follow biosecurity steps, to be vigilant in their observation of their flock, looking for signs and working with a local vet to bring an end to this situation.

7. What steps must a producer take if an avian influenza outbreak is suspected?

As part of the existing USDA avian influenza response plans, Federal, State and industry partners are responding quickly and decisively to these outbreaks by following these five basic steps with egg-related producers:

- **Quarantine:** Restricting poultry and poultry-moving equipment movement in and out of the control area.
- **Eradicate:** Humanely euthanizing the affected flock(s).
- **Monitor Region:** Testing wild and domestic birds in a broad area around the quarantine areas.
- **Disinfect:** Kill the virus in the affected flock locations.
- **Test:** Confirm that poultry farms in the area are free of the virus.

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship in partnership with the Iowa Department of Public Health are working directly with poultry workers at affected facilities to ensure proper precautions are being taken.

8. What can an egg-related producer expect with quarantine?

- A written quarantine order, signed by the State Veterinarian, will be delivered in person to people living with the area. Any domesticated poultry identified within the area will be tested.
- The ISU Veterinary Diagnostic Lab (VDL) in Ames is authorized to conduct testing on submitted samples. When delivered prior to 11:30 am, they are prepared to provide same-day results. You will

receive automatic correspondence via email with the positive or negative test results, if you've provided an email address.

- If the VDL returns a presumptive positive test result, the sample is driven to the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) where a confirmation test is performed to identify the subtype of the virus.
- After the initial sample, a second sample will be taken two weeks later. When results from this second test are completed and the quarantine is released, the poultry owner will receive a letter with test results from the State Veterinarian.
- The State Veterinarian's office will handle requests for transport of poultry, poultry products, feed, manure, wood chips and bedding from the premises outside the quarantine zone. A permit can be issued.
- A permit is required for each movement of poultry or poultry products into or out of AI control zones. Permits are for movement from the origin premises – therefore, requests for permits should come from the origin premises. All requests should be submitted 24 – 48 hours prior to the desired movement.
- USDA FSIS and APHIS as well as the FDA have authority to manage the handling of the eggs. IDALS has issued permits for trucks to move if these agencies authorize their transport for pasteurization.

9. Will producers be compensated for their losses?

The government doesn't compensate producers for birds that die of the disease itself. But it does reimburse them for birds that have to be euthanized as a precaution. That gives farmers an incentive to report suspected outbreaks and deal with them swiftly.

10. Will poultry and egg prices be affected?

An Iowa State University economist has said the outbreak could push prices up to 5% higher for consumers.

11. What are the long-term solutions to this outbreak?

Iowa is the leading egg producer in the U.S. providing about one in five eggs sold nationwide and is expected to remain so. While the timeframe for recovery is unknown for both individual producers and the regional outbreak overall, agricultural experts believe that as temperatures rise, the outbreaks should subside as the virus thrives only in cooler weather. Also, the USDA is working on a vaccine to counter the deadly strain in poultry. There would be some restrictions internationally in accepting these American products.

12. Where can I learn more?

- Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship:
www.iowaagriculture.gov/avianinfluenza.asp.
- The State Veterinarian Office can be at 515-281-5321
- The USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593.
- Additional information on biosecurity for backyard flocks can be found at
<http://healthybirds.aphis.usda.gov>.

About the Iowa Egg Council

The [Iowa Egg Council](#) is a producer-supported organization established in 1973. Its mission is to increase consumption of eggs through promotion, education and research.

About the Iowa Poultry Association

The [Iowa Poultry Association](#) provides for industry response to consumer, regulatory, environmental and political issues, joining forces with members to accomplish what individual firms can't do alone. IPA helps create a strong climate in Iowa for egg and poultry farmers through efforts to educate and inform