

Avian Influenza Advisory for Small Flock Owners and Bird Fanciers

On April 8, 2015, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) confirmed the presence of a highly pathogenic H5N2 avian influenza virus at a turkey farm near Woodstock, Ontario. Avian influenza (AI) can infect domesticated and wild birds, including chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quails, ducks, geese, pigeons, psittacines and guinea fowl. A highly pathogenic virus, as opposed to a low pathogenic virus, can cause severe illness and death in domestic birds. Some of the bird species may not be affected to this extent but will be able to infect other species. Birds become infected when they have direct contact with the secretions or feces of infected birds, or with contaminated surfaces or infected food and water supplies.

People who raise small flocks or game birds for personal or limited commercial purposes should be aware of the risk to their birds from diseases such as avian influenza. During an avian influenza outbreak, attending poultry events can increase the risk of spreading diseases. Diseases are most often transmitted from one infected flock to another flock by infected birds, and contaminated people or equipment. Moving infected birds can result in transferring AI virus to a new location. If infected birds are moved through an auction, or “swap meet”, then the AI virus can be transferred to multiple new locations. Birds that appear to be healthy can be infected and can transmit AI to other birds before exhibiting any signs of disease themselves.

Birds with outdoor access should not share areas with wild ducks, geese, or shorebirds. Make sure free-range areas do not have attractions for wild waterfowl, such as a pond or open feeders, which may become contaminated with wild waterfowl droppings.

Be very diligent in observing your birds. Monitor mortalities and track feed and water consumption. Watch for any signs of disease, such as depression, decreased feed consumption, drop in egg production, swollen wattles, sneezing, gasping, a discharge from the nose or eyes, diarrhea or sudden death.

Early detection is critical. **Should you suspect any signs of health concerns in your flock, contact your veterinarian immediately.**

Prevention is the key. Take the following steps:

- Avoid attending shows, sales, and swap meets during a disease outbreak.
- Do not allow people who have recently been in contact with other birds (e.g., their own or attending a bird sale or show) near your birds.
- Do not share equipment with other bird owners.
- If you add new birds to your flock, at any time, make sure that you get their complete background information, including a history of any diseases and vaccinations, and keep the vendor's contact information in the event that your birds become sick, so that they can be traced to their flock of origin.
- Keep new birds or those returning from shows separate and preferably in a different airspace (quarantined) for at least 2-4 weeks after returning home, and monitor them for signs of illness. Clean and disinfect the cages and equipment used for these birds. Use separate clothing, footwear and equipment for quarantined birds, and handle them last. If the same equipment and clothing must be used, clean and disinfect them before and after handling the birds. Wash your hands between the two groups.

Additional information is available at:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/poultry/smallflock.html>

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/poultry/facts/12-039.pdf>

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/organic/news/2015/2015-02a2.htm>

<http://inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/diseases/bird-health-basics/eng/1323643634523/1323644740109>

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