

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

March 2026

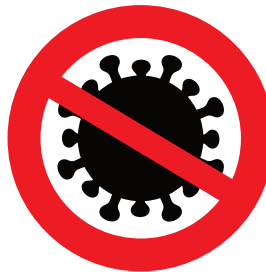
Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) continues to circulate in Ontario and across Canada. While case numbers fluctuate throughout the year, the virus is now considered an ongoing risk, with increased transmission often associated with seasonal wild bird migration. Outbreaks continue to occur in poultry flocks, and vigilance remains critical.

Recent detections of HPAI in some U.S. dairy herds highlight the evolving nature of the virus and its ability to affect multiple species. To date, no confirmed cases of HPAI have been found in Canadian cattle, and protections are currently in place to prevent similar outbreaks.

OFA and other agricultural organizations continue to monitor and respond to HPAI as an ongoing health challenge. Here are some tips for prevention, monitoring, and reporting avian influenza in livestock and poultry.

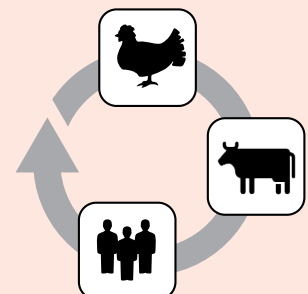
Clinical symptoms of HPAI infection in livestock and poultry:

- Reduced appetite
- Lethargy
- Fever
- Dehydration
- Thickened, discoloured milk (dairy)
- Decreased milk production (dairy)



Human Health Considerations

The risk of HPAI transmission to the general public remains low. However, individuals working closely with infected animals may be at higher risk and should follow appropriate personal protective measures. Public health authorities continue to monitor the situation and implement targeted precautions for higher-risk groups.



Spread

HPAI is primarily transmitted to animals by infected migratory birds and can be spread further on farms by people through clothing, shoes, vehicles, equipment, and water. In some cases, wild birds may carry the virus without showing visible signs of illness, contributing to ongoing environmental exposure risk for farms.

Domestic poultry like chickens, laying hens and turkeys have no natural immunity to HPAI. When they become infected, it has devastating consequences for the birds themselves, as well as the poultry industry, and our food supply system.

HPAI does not pose a food safety risk when poultry products (wild and domestic) are handled and cooked properly.

Limiting spread

Animal to animal

- Closely follow biosecurity practices
- Monitor livestock and poultry for signs of illness
- Restrict animal movement unless necessary
- Isolate and monitor sick animals immediately
- Disinfect boots and equipment
- Limit human movement on-farm, including those that come from off-farm
- Reduce bird and wildlife access to farm properties
- Maintain separation between different species of livestock where possible

Animal to people

- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment when handling sick animals
- Follow proper biosecurity and disinfection protocols
- Change clothing before moving between farms
- Limit contact with other livestock and poultry premises
- Restrict human movement on farm and those from off-farm

Water, feed, and air

- Restrict unnecessary equipment and vehicles on farm
- Change clothing before moving between farms
- Reduce standing water on your property
- Do not use surface water as a source of drinking water
- Separate biosecurity zones
- Prevent contamination of feed and water sources by wild birds

Backyard and Small Flock Considerations

Small and backyard flocks remain particularly vulnerable to HPAI due to increased exposure to wild birds and variable biosecurity practices. All flock owners, regardless of size, should follow strict biosecurity measures.

Disinfection

HPAI is killed easily using common disinfectants. Keep equipment, clothing, and footwear clean to protect animal and human health. Consistent and routine cleaning and disinfection practices are essential for reducing ongoing risk.

What to do if you think your birds or livestock are sick

Closely monitor the health status of your animals for clinical signs of disease. If you detect any sick animals on your farm, isolate them and contact your veterinarian immediately. Work with your veterinarian on testing, care of sick animals, and steps for returning them to the herd.

Do not handle any sick or dead birds found on your farm.

Contact your local Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative office for guidance. In Ontario, contact the Ontario regional centre of the Canadian Wildlife Cooperative at 1 (866) 673-4781.

Please see the following resources for more information:

Ontario

Avian Influenza in Poultry

Canada

Government of Canada Website on Avian Influenza

Avian Influenza Factsheet

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Livestock

HPAI: Biosecurity Recommendations for Dairy Farmers

National Biosecurity Standards and Biosecurity Principles

Notice to Industry: HPAI in Dairy Cattle in the USA- Addendum to Export Certificate

Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative Reporting of Sick Birds

United States

CDC Avian Influenza

National Milk Producers Federation Biosecurity Resource

USDA Updates on HPAI

Additional resources:

Boot Washing Factsheet

Handwashing Factsheet

Health and Safety Equipment

Quarantine/ Mortality Management Factsheet