



Avian Influenza (AI)

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza (AI) is a flu virus that may cause illness in domestic poultry, fowl and birds. Migratory waterfowl are a natural reservoir for this disease.

There are many strains of the AI virus. Based on the severity of illness caused by the virus, these strains are put into two classifications, low pathogenic (LPAI) and highly pathogenic (HPAI). Most virus strains are typically considered LPAI and cause little to no clinical signs in infected birds. However, some strains are highly pathogenic or capable of mutating to HPAI under certain field conditions. HPAI can be an extremely infectious and fatal form of the disease.

Clinical Signs

Birds infected with AI may exhibit one or more of these signs:

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production
- Soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelid, comb, wattles and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs and legs
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing and sneezing
- Incoordination
- Diarrhea

Introduction & Spread of AI

The movement of poultry, equipment and people has increased the risk of introducing AI into flocks. Birds exposed to migratory waterfowl are also at increased risk for contracting the virus.

Once AI is introduced into a flock, it can be spread by direct bird-to-bird contact or mechanical transmission via manure, equipment, vehicles, egg flats and crates. Employees and visitors can also carry the virus on contaminated clothing and shoes.

In moderate temperatures, the AI virus can remain viable for long periods of time. In a frozen environment, the virus can survive indefinitely.

Biosecurity Measures

Poultry producers should follow sound biosecurity practices to prevent the introduction of AI into their flocks.

- Keep an all-in, all-out philosophy of flock management.

- Thoroughly clean and disinfect all equipment, tires and undercarriages of vehicles before entering or leaving the farm.
- Allow only essential personnel and vehicles to enter the farm.
- Provide clean clothing and disinfection facilities for employees.
- Protect poultry flocks from coming into contact with wild or migratory birds.
- Keep poultry away from any source of water that may have been contaminated by wild birds.
- Avoid visiting other poultry farms. If you must go where other poultry are located, disinfect or change clothing and shoes before returning to your farm.
- Do not bring birds to the farm unless you know the health status of the flock of origin.

Biosecurity Measures for Flea Markets and Live Bird Markets

To prevent an outbreak of AI, poultry producers and dealers should practice sound biosecurity at the markets and other locations where live poultry are sold. The AI virus can be introduced into these locations via infected birds, contaminated crates or trucks and equipment.

Once established, the disease can quickly spread as birds and equipment are transported from point of sale to the farm or other market settings.

- For easier cleaning, use metal crates instead of plastic or wooden crates.
- Keep the facility, scales and area free of manure, feathers and other debris that could harbor the virus.
- Clean and disinfect all equipment, crates and vehicles prior to taking them to a premise after being at a location where poultry have been sold.
- Maintain newly procured poultry separate from other birds, especially if the poultry originate from different lots.
- Clean and disinfect the marketplace each day after the sale is complete.

Report Suspicious Signs

If your birds exhibit unusual death loss or signs of illness, call your private veterinarian or the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) immediately at 1-800-550-8242. A veterinarian is on call 24 hours a day. A Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostician (FADD) may be dispatched to collect samples for laboratory testing and to begin a disease investigation.

Information provided by the
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