

Bird Flu: Identification and Reporting

Avian Influenza (AI), also known as “bird flu,” is a group of viruses that can infect domestic and wild birds. AI viruses can be classified by their ability to cause illness and death. Highly pathogenic AI is extremely infectious, can cause high death loss and can spread rapidly from flock to flock. Low pathogenic AI produces a less dangerous form of the illness. AI can be further divided by subtypes. Subtypes H5 and H7 are of special concern, because they are highly pathogenic.

AI is spread through the bodily fluids and feces of infected birds. Wild birds act as a host for the virus. They may not show signs of the disease, even if they have it. Other species that may be able to catch the bird flu virus include pigs, primates, ferrets, rodents, rabbits, cats, and humans.

Common signs of AI in domestic poultry, such as chickens and turkeys, may include:

- Sudden death
- Little or no energy or appetite
- Little or no eggs produced
- Eggs are soft or deformed
- Nasal discharge, coughing, sneezing, or trouble breathing
- Swelling around the head, neck, and eyes
- Purple discoloration
- Loss of muscle control
- Drooping wings, twisting of head and neck, or inability to move
- Diarrhea



Birds may have the disease for 3-7 days before the first signs are seen. Death may occur 24-48 hours after the first signs. Other diseases in birds can cause symptoms like those listed above. Always seek a veterinarian’s advice. Wear latex or rubber gloves and washable clothing when touching sick or dead birds. Do not touch feces or bodily fluids from sick or dead birds.



Early detection and reporting are the most important steps in stopping a disease from spreading. Those who see unusual symptoms or that have a high number of deaths in their flock should call their local veterinarian or the Kentucky Office of State Veterinarian at (502) 782-5920. They can also call the USDA’s toll-free hotline at (866) 536-7593, where veterinarians can answer questions.

Call the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife at (866) 4US-DAWS or the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife at (800) 858-1549 to report sick or dead wild birds. Call to report any number of sick or dead waterfowl. For any other type of wild bird, only call to report if there are 5 or more birds.