**24 November 2020**

Avian influenza (AI) has been detected at three locations across Victoria. AI is a highly infectious disease affecting many bird species including pet and farmed chickens and can result in significant deaths on poultry farms. Movement controls are now in place to prevent the spread of AI.

# What is Avian Influenza?

Avian influenza (AI), commonly referred to as ‘bird flu’, is a highly contagious viral infection of birds. Serious forms of the disease can cause severe symptoms and sudden death in domestic poultry (up to 100 per cent of birds). Mild strains of the disease cause few or no symptoms in poultry and may go undetected in some species of birds, though can result in some deaths.

# What are the symptoms?

Symptoms associated with AI can include; sudden death, respiratory distress, swelling of the head, purple discolouration of the comb and wattles, coughing, sneezing, rasping breathing, rapid decrease in feed and water intake, decreased egg production, ruffled feathers, depression, closed eyes, diarrhea and occasionally nervous signs.

# How is the virus spread?

Wild birds are considered the natural host for AI and it is often carried without showing any symptoms of the disease. Sometimes the disease spills over into domestic poultry populations. Infected birds shed the virus in saliva, nasal secretions and faeces. The exposure of wild birds to domestic birds, particularly poultry, or to their feed or water supply, can lead to the emergence of AI.

# What species are affected?

Domestic poultry, ducks, geese, turkeys, guinea fowl, quail, pheasants, emus and ostriches are most susceptible to being affected by AI. Many species of wild birds, including waterfowl and seabirds can carry the virus but usually show no signs of disease.

# Can the virus spread to humans?

Avian influenza is rarely spread from birds to people. Humans that do become infected usually experience mild flu-like symptoms.

On the rare occasions when people have become infected from birds, the AI virus does not appear to be readily transmitted to other people. **People cannot be infected by eating cooked chicken meat or eggs.**

# What are the human symptoms of AI?

The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services confirmed the H7N7, and H7N6 and H5N2 strains are not a risk to the public as they rarely affect humans unless there is direct and close contact with sick birds.

If you have had contact with birds on an affected property and you are experiencing cold or flu symptoms, call your doctor or the Department of Health and Human Services on 1300 651 160 for medical advice.

# What do i need to do?

All bird owners, particularly those living in the current Restricted and Control Areas, need to be vigilant for any signs of AI in their flocks. Owners of backyard poultry or free-range poultry should be especially cautious as they are more likely to be exposed to wild birds. Owners should report any unexplained sick or dead birds to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline 1800 675 888.

A close up of a sign

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# HOW do I protect my birds from ai?

Implement good biosecurity measures to prevent wild birds from gaining access to the same food and water supplies as your poultry. This may include:

* preventing domesticated poultry from accessing open ponds, lakes, creeks or other watercourses
* purchasing poultry and birds, litter and feed from accredited sources
* quarantining new birds until comfortable they are disease-free
* separating poultry and their food and drink from wild birds (e.g. by using netting)
* storing litter and feed securely to avoid contamination by wild birds
* practising good hygiene at all times
* not permitting visitors to areas where poultry are kept
* maintaining facilities (e.g. poultry sheds) to ensure safe and hygienic containment.

Water supplied to poultry should not originate from sources where wild birds frequent. The following water sources are less likely to be contaminated:

* treated (chlorinated) mains water
* bore water that has been tested and is suitable quality for poultry; poultry have a low tolerance to saline water.

# What do I do if I suspect AI?

Bird owners should be vigilant for signs of disease especially where multiple deaths occur in poultry, or many birds are unwell.

**Avian influenza is a notifiable disease. Suspicion of infection must be reported to Agriculture Victoria on the Emergency Animal Disease hotline 1800 675 888 or to your local Agriculture Victoria Animal Health and Welfare staff.**

# What is the government’s response to AI?

Avian influenza outbreaks require a rapid and effective response to eradicate the disease and minimize the risk of the virus spreading to other birds and people. Government agencies work closely with industry and poultry owners during an incident. Compensation arrangements are available in declared outbreaks to assist financially if impacted (e.g. payment for birds or property that may be destroyed as part of an eradication program).

The response to an outbreak of the more significant strains of AI usually involves depopulation of infected and in-contact poultry, decontamination, quarantine and movement controls to prevent the spread of infection, and tracing and surveillance activities to determine the spread of infection.

# What are the movement controls?

Movement controls dependent on the risk, have been put in place. These controls prohibit, until further notice, the movement of birds, equipment and products within and out of, the designated Restricted Area and Control Area, except under permit issued by Agriculture Victoria.

# how do I apply for a permit?

For movement permits of poultry, poultry products and vehicles involved in poultry production within the Restricted and Control Areas please apply online at [agriculture.vic.gov.au/avianflu](https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-diseases/poultry-diseases/avian-influenza-bird-flu). Permits are processed during business hours. Please see the relevant map and contact the Customer Contact Centre on (03) 4334 2715 (Monday – Friday 9 am – 5 pm) for advice on a permit.

# Are my eggs safe to eat?

No food safety issues have been identified – properly cooked chicken meat and eggs are safe to eat.

# Can I give my eggs to family and friends?

Eggs, equipment, poultry or birds can only be moved within the Restricted and Control areas with a permit.

Outside the Restricted and Control areas, you can continue to collect eggs from your birds and give them to family and friends without a permit. This is provided they also live outside the Restricted and Control areas. and all coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions on movement are followed.

# Can I continue selling my eggs privately?

Eggs, equipment, poultry or birds can only be moved outside, into or within the Restricted and Control areas with a permit. Outside the Restricted and Control areas you can continue selling eggs for human consumption, provided you comply with the Victorian Food Act 1984 and national Primary Production and Processing Standard for Eggs and Egg Product (the Standard) and all other obligations.

# Where Can i get more information?

More information on AI, and the current incidents including maps, is available on the Agriculture Victoria website: [agriculture.vic.gov.au/avianflu](https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-diseases/poultry-diseases/avian-influenza-bird-flu).

Accessibility

If you would like to receive this information/publication in an accessible format (such as large print or audio) please call the Customer Service Centre on 136 186, TTY 1800 122 969, or email customer.service@ecodev.vic.gov.au.

This document is also available in (PDF and/or Word) format at [www.agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au)

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