



Defend the Flock

YOUR BIOSECURITY BULLETIN

Spring 2025

Q&A with Dr. Tyler McAlpin



We sat down with Dr. Tyler McAlpin, a USDA APHIS Veterinary Medical Officer, to learn how livestock owners can prevent and stop the spread of avian influenza across animal species.

Why are flocks at increased risk this spring?

Spring and fall are the two migratory seasons for birds. Migratory wild birds typically carry and spread avian influenza viruses through their droppings, which can then expose poultry like chickens and turkeys. We urge farmers and backyard bird owners to take steps to protect their flocks during the spring migration season.

To what extent has highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) spread?

HPAI is a very contagious and often deadly respiratory disease. As of early 2025, it has been detected in all 50 states in migratory waterfowl, commercial poultry, and backyard or hobbyist flocks. Over 168 million birds have been affected. It can also spread to other animals.

So other animals can contract HPAI too?

Yes. We've seen cases of avian influenza moving across species from birds to dairy cattle, for example, and to domesticated animals like cats.

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Avian Flu Biosecurity Basics

Suit Up

Have everyone use dedicated boots and gloves in your poultry area.

Clean Up

Wash hands and equipment. Protect food and water from wild birds, pests, and pets.

Divide Up

Separate your species. The virus can move from birds to animals and back.

Brush Up

Learn the signs of avian influenza in your flock and how to report it.

BE A FLU FIGHTER

On April 17, Dr. Melissa Yates will present a special webinar, "From Backyard to Barnyard: Biosecurity for Poultry on a Multi-Species Farm." Join us at 2:30 PM EDT to learn affordable and practical ways to defend your flock.



LEARN MORE & REGISTER FOR THE WEBINAR >>>

Report Sick Birds If you see signs of illness, take action right away!

Veterinarian
Cooperative Extension Office
State Veterinarian/Animal or Poultry Diagnostic Lab
USDA

866.536.7593





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How can flock owners keep their birds healthy and protect them from HPAI?

Maintaining good biosecurity is essential for both backyard and commercial livestock operations. Focus on keeping migratory birds, their droppings, and feathers away from vulnerable animals, and avoid leaving feed exposed. Make your property less attractive as a stopover for migratory birds, whether you raise poultry, dairy cattle, goats, or other livestock.

What other biosecurity measures should farmers or hobbyists take to protect all their livestock from HPAI?

In addition to removing wild birds and bird material from your pens, try to increase the barrier between wild birds and your livestock. Large commercial operators should already be vigilant in adhering to biosecurity best practices. Download our free [biosecurity plan templates](#). Beyond that, backyard operators and hobbyists can:

- Wear clean boots and clothes upon entering livestock areas so as not to track manure and feathers from outside of it.
- Don't share equipment. The goal of biosecurity is decreasing your risk of the disease coming in and taking steps to decrease that risk.



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Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Feed your livestock in a way that does not encourage wild birds and animals to come in, and clean up any remaining food.
- Avoid mixing species. Keep other animals and strangers off your property. Keep livestock and pets away from birds, bird feed, and litter.

What are the signs that an animal may have HPAI?

Do you notice a decrease in food intake? Are you noticing general illness? That goes for all animals. Are you seeing larger amounts of death in your animals or nearby wildlife? Do you have cats that have died? Those are all possible signs. Are the animals coughing, like signs of a respiratory illness? That may or may not be a sign. In dairy cattle, mastitis, which is an infection in lactating animals, may or may not be a sign as well. These are things to keep an eye on.

If someone suspects their poultry or other animals may be sick, what should they do?

Contact your local veterinarian. Isolate your sick animals from the others. Practice good hygiene and try not to track things in or out of your livestock pens. Disinfect your clothes and equipment. If you see a lot of your animals die suddenly, call your local vet as well as the State Animal Health Officials.

For more information about how to keep your flocks healthy, follow **Defend the Flock** on **Facebook** and **X** and visit www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/defend-the-flock.

