

Avian Influenza Fact Sheet

Pathogenic avian influenza is not present in the New Zealand Poultry Industry and there has never been an outbreak of any pathogenic avian influenza in New Zealand. Freedom from Avian Influenza and other major poultry diseases is a reflection of New Zealand's unique poultry biosecurity status.

Raw poultry meat and eggs are not imported into New Zealand. Eggs and poultry meat purchased at your supermarket or retailer are New Zealand produced.

What is Avian Influenza (AI)?

AI is a contagious viral infection that can affect all species of birds. Domestic poultry, especially chickens and turkeys are affected most severely by the disease. Wild birds may carry influenza viruses but do not appear to be affected by these viruses.

What causes AI?

The virus which causes AI is an Influenza A virus of the family *Orthomyxoviridae*. AI viruses are classified according to their ability to cause disease with very virulent viruses referred to as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) viruses cause a much milder form of the disease and in some cases there are very few if any symptoms of the disease and far fewer birds die.

Does AI affect humans?

AI does not normally spread to humans but some cases have been reported. The cases reported to date have all been a result of direct contact with affected birds.

Can AI spread between humans?

The World Health Organisation reports that there are no confirmed cases of human to human transmission of Avian Influenza.

Why is there concern about the current outbreak?

Because influenza viruses are highly unstable, there is some concern that when avian influenza viruses are circulating at the same time as human viruses, there is potential for the two to combine and create a new influenza virus which may spread easily between people.



The present outbreak of H5N1 in South East Asia and its apparent spread through Russia and Europe is of concern because of the size of the outbreak, the number of countries affected, and the range of birds, including wild ducks and geese, and mammals affected.

Are New Zealanders at risk from eating poultry products?

There is no evidence that any of the human cases of avian influenza have been acquired by eating poultry products.

All poultry in New Zealand is free from Avian Influenza and no raw meat or table eggs are imported into New Zealand.

Could migratory birds import AI into New Zealand?

Migratory waterfowl (ducks and geese) may act as a primary infection source. Fortunately New Zealand is not on a migration pathway for waterfowl. Ducks and geese do not migrate across the equator and thus Australasian ducks and geese do not mix with Northern Hemisphere ducks and geese, which have recently been implicated in the spread of AI in Asia and Eastern Europe. This limits the possibility of AI entering New Zealand with a migrating flock. The majority of migratory birds entering New Zealand are shorebirds or waders, with the most common the bar-tailed godwit which flies directly from Alaska to New Zealand. Others may visit estuaries along the Asian coastline, the Philippines and Australia on route from arctic Russia.

Even though the risk of AI entering New Zealand with migrating flocks of birds is low, MAF routinely conducts surveys of migratory birds entering New Zealand soon after they arrive in this country. In the last 2 years almost 2000 samples were collected from a range of migratory bird species and no avian influenza viruses were isolated from any of these samples or from the smaller number of samples collected in previous years.

What are the symptoms of AI in poultry?

Clinical signs of AI are highly variable and may be influenced by the strain of the virus, the age and species of bird affected, and the presence or absence of other diseases and prevailing environmental conditions. The main symptoms include

- sudden and unexplained deaths
- a rapid spread of disease throughout the flock
- depression and loss of appetite
- a drop in egg production
- nervous signs
- facial swelling
- coughing, sneezing and diarrhoea

If you suspect that your poultry are infected with avian influenza, please call the

MAF Exotic Disease

Hotline:

0800 809 966

Some of the clinical signs of Avian Influenza are shown below



Swollen Wattles

(Picture courtesy of USA Animal Health Association)



Cyanotic shanks

(Picture courtesy of MAF / Biosecurity New Zealand)



Swollen wattles & comb

(Picture courtesy of MAF / Biosecurity New Zealand)



Blue discoloration of comb in chicken on left, normal chicken on right

(Picture courtesy of USA Animal Health Association)

LINKS

For more information on avian influenza see our links page