

## Avian Influenza: Questions and Answers

### **Q1. What is avian influenza (AI)/Bird flu and which birds does it affect?**

Avian influenza is a highly infectious disease affecting many species of birds, including commercial, wild and pet birds. It may also affect people and other animals in certain circumstances. A Type A influenza virus causes it.

### **Q2. What are the signs of the disease?**

The severity depends upon the strain of virus and the type of bird infected. Birds infected with AI may die suddenly or show a range of clinical signs including respiratory signs, swollen heads, dullness, a drop in egg production, and a loss of appetite. Some birds, especially waterfowl, can be infected with AI without showing any signs of disease

### **Q3. Once it is present, how is it spread?**

AI is spread by movement of infected birds or contact with respiratory secretions, and in particular faeces, directly or through contaminated objects, clothes or vehicles.

### **Q4. Does it affect humans and if so, how?**

Humans are usually infected only through close contact with infected poultry. The severity of disease in humans varies from mild disease to severe respiratory disease. This depends on the strain of virus and characteristics of the person infected. Human deaths have been reported following severe disease.

### **Q5. Can people get it from other people?**

There have been a limited number of cases in which there has been evidence to suggest person-to-person transmission but to date there is no evidence that the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus has adapted to spread easily in humans.

### **Q6. Which group of people would most be at risk if we had the disease in poultry in the UK?**

People in close contact with infected poultry or infected material from poultry are most at risk. This would include poultry farm workers, Veterinarians and others Involved in disease control.

### **Q7. Can we vaccinate people against bird flu?**

A. No. There is currently **no vaccine to protect people against AI infection or disease**, though one is being developed. There is however good evidence that avian flu viruses respond to antiviral drugs.

**Q8. Can I get AI from handling wild birds?**

The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens considers that the risk of transmission of AI from wild birds to the general public is small. **However, to minimise any risk it is advisable to carry out general hygiene precautions when handling wild birds, such as wearing disposable protective gloves when picking up and handling carcasses and washing hands, nails and forearms thoroughly with soap and water after handling the carcass.**

**Q9. What am I at risk from?**

Although the risk of AI may be low, birds carry other respiratory infections. Birds can also carry infections, which can cause gastrointestinal infections such as Salmonella and Campylobacter.

**Q10. What should I do if I find a number of dead birds?**

If you find 1 or more dead swans/wild fowl (ducks and geese), more than 3 dead birds of the same species or more than 5 dead birds of different species, in the same place, you should contact the Defra Helpline (08459 33 55 77). Currently the Helpline is available between the following hours Monday - Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday - Sunday 9am to 6pm. You will be asked for details of your finding and its location.

**Q11. Is there anything I should do if I find many dead birds and can't get hold of anyone on a weekend or Bank Holiday?**

You should be able to reach someone on the number given. In the unlikely event of not being able to get through, please capture as much detail as you can about the incident, including precise detail of location, and then telephone through on the next working day.

**Q12. Should I report dead birds that look like they've been hit by a car or savaged by a wild animal?**

Not if it's clear that that's the cause of death, or if the carcass is starting to putrefy.