

Preparing for Avian Influenza – Separating flocks from wild birds



Uywodaeth Cynullid Cymru
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SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



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Department for Environment
Food and Rural Affairs

Avian Influenza (or bird flu) is spreading internationally. All bird keepers need to plan how they will protect their flocks from the fatal strains of this disease if it reaches the United Kingdom.

One of the main ways in which the disease may be spread is by contact between infected wild birds and domestic poultry. That is why, if the disease is found in this country, **you may be required by law to house your birds indoors** or otherwise isolate them from wild birds. This is for the protection of your own flock and others.

If housing is not fully practicable, you will be required to take all reasonable steps to minimise contact between your birds and wild birds. You must also ensure that your birds do not have any contact with poultry or captive birds on other holdings.

These are important disease control requirements. In the event of an outbreak, if you cannot meet them, you may have to reduce stock numbers through culling.

This leaflet therefore helps you find practical ways to meet your legal obligations. You should read it if you keep poultry for commercial or hobby purposes; if you keep ducks or geese; if you keep other captive birds including raptors, and if you are involved in rearing game birds.

Please bear in mind that failure to comply with disease control requirements could lead the relevant enforcement authority to bring action against you.

Protecting your birds

As a keeper of birds, you are responsible for their welfare both now and during an outbreak. The Government has already asked keepers of birds to feed and water birds indoors and to remain vigilant for disease risks.

What does the law require?

If there is an outbreak of an avian notifiable disease, all birds within at least 3km of the infected holding are **immediately** required to be housed or otherwise kept separate from wild birds while the outbreak

is brought under control. The requirement could remain in force for **several weeks**.

Even if you are not in the vicinity of an outbreak, the Government may issue a **temporary nationwide legal order for birds to be housed indoors as far as is practicable** if Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is found. It might also do so as a preventive measure if there is a significant risk of an outbreak. The order will be issued to prevent spread of the disease while the source of the virus is identified and immediate action is taken to control the outbreak.

A requirement to keep your birds separate from wild birds will also apply to free range and organic producers. Under current legislation this may mean that your produce cannot be marketed as free-range or organic. However, the UK Government and industry representatives are seeking a rapid resolution of this issue at EU level and will keep you informed of progress.

Ways to protect your birds

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza can be spread through faecal droppings from infected birds. Control of the disease depends on minimising contact between potentially infected wild birds and managed birds. Housing your birds indoors is the best way to achieve this. For most keepers, a little prior planning should make it easier to comply with the housing requirement.

If you are unable to house all your birds indoors, the aim should be to minimise the chance of wild birds landing close to your birds, mingling with them and contaminating their water and feed supply.

Housing

The first and best option is to house your birds and all practicable steps should be taken to ensure that this happens. If your birds are normally housed indoors this should not present major problems. If you have concerns about possible loss of status, for example, organic or free range, we recommend that you refer to the responsible sector body.

- Keep your birds inside their existing houses. Ensure that any openings are netted to prevent wild birds gaining access. 25mm aperture net is recommended to keep out small birds.

If your birds have access outside you will have to plan alternative housing. There are different housing options which can be considered including:

- Making use of existing buildings (such as barns, sheds, outbuildings) adapted for your birds. Ensure that any openings are netted to prevent wild birds gaining access.
- Erecting a lean-to veranda on the side of existing houses.
- Erecting a new temporary structure to house birds. This may be a building with solid walls and roof or a polytunnel. A polytunnel will be suitable only in cooler weather.

If after considering these options they do not prove to be practical, other steps you should take include:

- Erecting a net structure/shade house and ensuring that the netting used is of a suitable size to keep out small birds; 25mm aperture is recommended.
- Constructing temporary outdoor pens using straw bales and a tarpaulin roof with bird-proof netted gaps for light and ventilation.
- If bad weather is likely to be a problem it may be necessary to erect a windbreak around your bird-proof structure.

We recommend that you refer to commercial suppliers of anti-bird netting for advice and further information on equipment.

Feeding and watering indoors

There are certain species of bird – such as ostrich, captive wildfowl or geese which are not normally housed during day or night – for which even the minimum housing steps outlined above may not be practicable. The very minimum action you should take is to isolate their food and water from wild birds. Availability of feed and water

will attract wild birds; by only feeding and watering your birds inside, the possibility of mingling is reduced. The steps you can take include:

- Provide extra protection to feed and water stations to avoid attracting wild birds.
- Rotate feeding times. Many wild birds learn when captive birds are fed and congregate at these times.
- Prevent your birds from accessing open water that may be contaminated. Ensure that your birds receive only mains or treated water.
- Install bird scarer systems to scare off wild birds. Types of scarer include auditory and visual scarers and deterrents. Most auditory scarers are designed to scare away all birds so may not be suitable for nervous birds and should be used with care.

Additional deterrents

In all cases you should also consider making use of wild bird deterrents such as flutter tape, flashing lights, scarecrows and auditory scarers.

Agricultural bird scarers are not suitable for domestic circumstances and must always be used responsibly, within the relevant legal controls.

When designing any housing structure, if posts are necessary, think about incorporating spike strips to deter perching.

Pheasants, partridges and other game birds

Birds should be housed whenever possible and, as a minimum, all feeding should take place under cover. However, where game birds are being raised for release it may be that these measures cannot be properly put in place. Bird scarer systems may need to be adopted. If the disease risk is high, careful consideration may have to be given to culling birds. Specialist advice is available from representative organisations and the State Veterinary Service.

Geese

Where small numbers of birds are kept, it should be possible to house them in the event of a disease outbreak. Temporary netted structures, feeding and watering under cover and using wild bird deterrents will reduce their mingling with wild birds, and can cover large areas. Where large numbers of birds are kept it may not be possible to bring them all indoors and you should consider all of the alternative methods described in this leaflet.

Captive wildfowl

Where possible, birds should be housed and as a minimum all feeding and watering should take place under cover. Separation of your birds from wild birds by netting their enclosures and the sensible use of deterrents will reduce their mingling with wild birds. You should consider moving your birds away from large bodies of water that attract similar species of wild birds.


Backyard flocks

In addition to the measures described in this leaflet, give careful consideration to alternative measures to prevent your birds from mingling with wild birds. For example, if you keep your birds in a domestic location, consider if alternative housing is available to them nearby. Suitable options may include a garden building, a garage or existing redundant buildings that could be adapted to house your birds temporarily.

Welfare

Housing for a sustained period birds that are not used to being housed may create welfare and behavioural problems. You should be vigilant for signs such as feather pecking and cannibalism.

Overcrowding may become a problem and you must take steps to ensure that the stocking density within each house will not reach the point at which bird welfare is compromised – a particular risk in hot weather or cold wet weather.



For chickens and turkeys being reared for consumption, you should consider reducing their growth rate to prevent over-crowding. However you should seek expert advice before doing so as these measures may themselves cause welfare problems.

You should provide fresh litter in all temporary accommodation and ensure adequate feed and water, ventilation and lighting is available. You should give consideration to some form of environmental enrichment, such as the use of straw bales.

Always ensure that your birds have clean water – do not use standing water that may have become contaminated by wild birds.

To ensure you pick up problems before they lead to deterioration of bird welfare you should increase supervision by stockmen, for example by increasing their number or the frequency of inspections.

Will I need planning permission to erect a structure?

Planning permission is not always required if the work does not involve building, engineering or similar operations. Permitted Development Rights exist for erecting structures in certain circumstances. Simple structures such as posts and netting might not require permission. It is unlikely, for example, that you would need planning permission if the structure is temporary, mobile, or used for the purposes of agriculture.

However, regulations will differ between commercial and hobby poultry keepers. It is always advisable in the first instance to check with your local council who will be able to direct you or, for England and Wales, go to **www.planningportal.gov.uk** for contact details.

Help and Advice

Effective biosecurity is a primary concern even before any instruction to house birds is issued. Visit **www.defra.gov.uk** for general biosecurity advice and to order further copies of this leaflet; alternatively call the Helpline on **08459 33 55 77**.

Look out for signs of disease in your flock. Increased mortality, falling egg production and respiratory distress may be early signs of a disease problem. If you suspect disease, ask your vet for advice as soon as possible. Avian influenza and Newcastle Disease are notifiable diseases. You must tell the Divisional Veterinary Manager (DVM) at the local Animal Health Divisional Office if you suspect these diseases.

Further guidance on planning is available in Appendix B to 'A Farmers Guide to the Planning System'. This Guide is available on the ODPM website under 'Planning, Planning Guidance and Advice' at: **www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1144475**

Information is also available on the following sites:

- **www.countryside.wales.gov.uk**
- **www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Agriculture/animal-welfare/Diseases/SpecificDisease/AvianInfluenza/AllIntroduction**
- **www.dardni.gov.uk**

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