



Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza– Advice for Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres

Background

From 21st April 2021, new legislation (Regulation (EU) 2016/429) also known as ‘Animal Health Law’ together with its supporting legislation came into force across Europe. These new regulations direct Member States of the European Union in relation to management of suspected and confirmed outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. Whilst most measures are broadly similar to what has gone before, there are some important changes.

Avian Influenza in Ireland

Avian influenza (Bird Flu) has been confirmed to be currently circulating in wild birds in Ireland. Through the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine’s (DAFM) avian influenza surveillance programme, the strain confirmed to be currently circulating in Ireland is highly pathogenic avian influenza subtype H5N1 (HPAI H5N1). The disease is highly contagious amongst birds, but the risk of transmission to humans is considered low.

However, as with all influenza A viruses, as there is potential for zoonotic spread (spread from animals to humans) it is wise to take appropriate precautions, by avoiding handling sick and dead wild birds suspected of being infected with avian influenza.

As part of Ireland’s avian influenza surveillance programme, DAFM collects and tests sick/dead wild birds that are reported. Not all birds will be collected and tested by DAFM. It is a legal requirement under both national and European legislation that any kept birds or poultry suspected of being infected with avian influenza are reported without delay to DAFM. The Department will then conduct an investigation to confirm or rule out the presence of disease.

During the course of such an investigation, any establishments that are under suspicion or are subsequently confirmed to be affected by avian influenza, will have certain restriction measures implemented including on the movements of animals, people and any object that could potentially spread infection from the site in order to mitigate against the risk of spread of disease.

Updates on the current avian influenza situation are regularly issued by the National Disease Control Centre (NDCC) and publicly available on the Department’s dedicated avian influenza webpage www.gov.ie/birdflu. You may also request to have these updates emailed directly to you by contacting ndcc@agriculture.gov.ie

What does this mean for Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres?

'Animal Health Law' considers that any birds brought into an establishment, including Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres, are considered to be a 'kept terrestrial animal'. This means that once in the care of an establishment these birds are no longer considered to be 'wild' and consequently, are subject to the same disease control measures that must be implemented in the case of an outbreak of avian influenza in poultry or other kept birds.

It is important to note that veterinary practices/clinics, and households where pet animals are kept are not considered to be establishments under the 'Animal Health Law'.

In the event of confirmation of the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Virus, all birds in an affected establishment would need to be euthanised under the supervision of an official veterinarian, and certain biosecurity measures applied. The premises would then need to be cleaned and disinfected according to a set protocol.

In addition, it is likely that certain restriction and control measures would be applied to poultry and captive bird establishments in the surrounding area as well as any flocks or holdings considered to be high-risk contacts.

These measures may include, but are not restricted to:

- Establishment of a minimum 3km Protection Zone around the infected premises
- Establishment of a minimum 10km Surveillance Zone around the infected premises
- Loss of Ireland's Avian Influenza disease-free status, with serious implications for international trade in poultry and poultry products.

It is worth noting that a number of Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres in the UK were depopulated during the most recent avian influenza season as a result of confirmed cases of the disease in birds rescued and brought onto the holding. Due to the increased risk presented by certain types of birds, some Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres made the voluntary decision not to accept certain birds during the high-risk period for avian influenza.

Best Biosecurity practice helps prevent spread of avian influenza

- Do not handle or allow birds with the following symptoms to enter the facility:
 - Moribund (i.e. in a dying state/ near death) or profound weakness
 - Sneezing, coughing, swollen head or wattle, bluish discolouration of head/neck
 - Depression, loss of appetite, excessive thirst
 - Nervous signs (drooping wings, dragging legs, twisting of the head and neck, circling, complete paralysis)
 - Diarrhoea

Biosecurity is the best protection against Avian Influenza

Maintenance of the strictest levels of biosecurity helps to protect birds from many infectious diseases, including avian influenza. The very nature of Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres' operations, continually admitting animals in need of care, presents challenges to maintaining high biosecurity levels.

However, there are certain biosecurity measures that continue to be effective, including the following:

Personnel and visitors

- Only allow essential personnel and visitors access to birds
- Wear disposable or dedicated outer clothing when in contact with birds
- Wear dedicated footwear that can be disinfected
- Wear disposable gloves and wash hands with disinfectant after contact with birds
- Personnel should not have poultry at home or work with poultry
- Personnel or visitors must avoid contact with poultry for at least 72 hours after contact with birds
- Keep a record of visitors and vehicles entering the facility

Buildings and equipment

- Provide boot washing and disinfectant footbaths at all entrances/exits to buildings and ensure that personnel use them. Footwear should be clean before being placed in the footbath; organic matter can prevent disinfectant from working
- Use disinfectant listed by DAFM as effective against avian influenza, the list of DAFM approved disinfectants may be found in Annex I. Ensure that the recommended dilution rate is used and that the disinfectant is changed in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines. The recommended contact times must also be followed. Cover the footbath to prevent dilution with rainfall
- Clean and disinfect any crates, containers or other equipment after use. These should not be shared with other facilities
- Use effective pest control
- Secure housing to prevent access by free ranging wild birds (i.e. wild birds that have not been rescued). Ensure that there are no gaps where wild birds or contaminated rainwater can enter housing, particularly by checking gutters and rooves
- Protect drinking water systems from contamination by free-ranging wild birds

Prevent interaction with free-ranging wild birds

- Feed and water birds inside or at least under cover
- Feed and bedding should be stored securely to prevent access by wild birds
- Clean up any waste feed in outdoor areas frequently
- Keep outside areas clean and tidy to avoid attracting wild birds and other animals
- Use netting, wild bird decoys or deterrents to keep wild birds away

Management

- Quarantine birds entering the facility for 14 days. This should be an area separate from the main facility
- Keep a record of birds in the facility, which should include the location of where the bird was found, species, clinical signs, and mortalities
- Barrier nursing should be implemented, i.e. wear appropriate PPE to prevent spread of infectious diseases from one bird to another
- Different bird populations should be kept separate from each other
- Other animals, including dogs, cats, rodents and wild birds, etc, must not be allowed access to the facility
- Birds should be checked regularly for signs of illness and isolated if showing the clinical signs outlined above

Further information on practical biosecurity measures can be found at www.gov.ie/birdflu

Public Health Advice

The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HSE-HPSC) and the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) advise that the risk to public health from avian influenza subtype H5N1 is **very low** and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) has determined that the disease poses no food safety risk to consumers of well-cooked poultry products, including eggs.

However, handlers of wild birds should **BE AWARE** of the risk of both avian and other avian pathogens (e.g. *Salmonella spp.*, *Chlamydia*).

During any period when avian influenza has been confirmed in wild birds, such as is currently the case, additional precautions to those listed above should be taken including:

- Avoid direct contact with water birds and gulls if possible, as these are highly susceptible to the infection
- If it is necessary to blow the feathers of the bird to aid examination, turn your head to one side to inhale before blowing (flapping of feathers has been shown to disperse viral particles)
- Avoid using a tube to blow feathers (if it is essential to so, clearly mark one end of the tube in order that the end of the tube initially in contact with the bird is not accidentally inserted into the mouth)
- Only carry out cloacal sexing of birds when absolutely necessary

The HSE recommend that people in regular contact with pigs, poultry or waterfowl are vaccinated against seasonal human flu. Further information on the flu vaccine is available on the [HSE website](#). People with regular contact with pigs, poultry or waterfowl may avail of a free flu vaccine.

Precautions that should be taken when handling wild birds

When handling **apparently healthy** wild birds, it is advisable to take hygienic precautions to protect yourself from a number of pathogens including avian influenza:

- Wear disposable gloves and dispose of all waste in a sealed bag in domestic/commercial waste bins
- Wash hands with hot soapy water after removing gloves and dry hands using a clean towel or use alcohol wipes/gel
- If a skin abrasion occurs, remove gloves immediately, wash hands with soapy water, dry with a clean towel and apply a waterproof plaster before putting on a new pair of gloves
- Wash and disinfect all equipment used when handling birds (10% solution of chlorine bleach may be used). Do not wash equipment in food preparation areas
- Do not eat, drink or smoke whilst handling wild birds
- Avoid contamination of hands and clothes with bird faeces. In the event of contamination, wipe the faeces away with alcohol wipes, place used wipes into a bag and wash hands with hot soapy water and dry hands using a clean towel or use alcohol wipes/gel
- Keep clothing used for handling birds separate from other clothes
- Vehicles, clothing, footwear and equipment used for handling birds should not be brought onto premises where poultry or other birds are kept

Do not handle sick wild birds displaying any of the following signs:

- moribund (i.e. in a dying state; near death) or profound weakness
- sneezing, coughing, swollen head or wattle, bluish discolouration of head/neck
- depression, loss of appetite, excessive thirst
- nervous signs (drooping wings, dragging legs, twisting of the head and neck, circling, complete paralysis)
- diarrhoea

Do not handle wild birds that are found dead

Reporting sick or dead wild birds

1. If you find dead or sick wild birds, or birds with any of the signs described above, report them without delay to your local [Regional Veterinary Office](#). Alternatively, contact the Avian Influenza Hotline (01) 607 2512 or the National Disease Emergency Hotline on (01) 492 8026 outside normal office hours
2. Sick/dead wild birds may also be reported via the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine's Avian Check App (accessible all hours) <https://aviancheck.apps.services.agriculture.gov.ie/>

National Disease Control Centre

Annex I: Disinfectants effective against avian influenza and other infectious diseases

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE

Authorised Products

IE BPA Number	Disinfectant	Diseases in respect of which use is approved and dilution rates ¹				
		Foot and Mouth Disease	Swine Vesicular Disease	Poultry Disease: Avian Influenza & Newcastle Disease	Other scheduled Diseases: Including Anthrax, Brucellosis, Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia and Glanders	
70448-02-009	Bimodex	550	100	100	100	
70448-02-001	FAM 30	550	100	100	100	
70448-02-007	Farmsan	550	100	100	100	
70451	Virophor 2.8%	50	50	50	50	
70448-02-006	Virudine Plus	550	100	100	100	

Notified Products under Art 89 of 528/2012

PCS Number	Disinfectant	Diseases in respect of which use is approved and dilution rates ¹				
		Foot and Mouth Disease	Swine Vesicular Disease	Poultry Disease: Avian Influenza & Newcastle Disease	Other scheduled Diseases: Including Anthrax, Brucellosis, Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia and Glanders	
97813	BioPhen	---	---	15	10	
97805	Bioshield P	60	---	80	40	
95451	BioVX	1200	100	200	100	
98872	Cyclex	---	---	24	24	
95716	FarmKlear	80	---	50	44	
93521	GPC 8	80	---	50	44	
96628	Hyperox	150	---	150	179	

98164	INCIMAXX DES-N	125	---	50	50	
95317	Intercid	---	---	100	40	
95745	Inter Farm 500	1000	---	500	500	
95318	Interkokask	19	19	24	50	
98756	Interkokask Concentrate	24	24	50	50	
97189	Intra Hydrocare	---	---	---	10	
97188	Intra Multi-Des GA	---	---	66	49	
94370	Jeyes Fluid	---	---	20	---	
98660	KC 5000	---	---	80	50	
98052	Kenocox	---	---	---	100	
94676	Kick Start 2	800	25	145	256	
96169	Kilcox Extra	---	100	100	50	
98321	Omnicide	---	100	125	50	
98322	Omnicide FGII	---	100	125	50	
94466	Perbac Farm	800	25	145	256	
93739	Seprivet 17	299	299	449	299	
98905	Sorgene Xtra	800	25	145	256	
93577	Virex	1300	100	100	100	
98166	Virkon H20	---	---	200	100	
97997	Virkon LSP	1100	50	90	40	
94148	Virkon S	1300	100	280	100	
97721	Virkon S Tablets	1000	---	250	100	
94665	Virocid	100	100	60	33	
93582	Viroshield	---	300	100	25	

¹

Dilution rate is expressed as one part (1 gram or 1 ml) of the preparation to the number of mls of water in the appropriate column.

READ CAREFULLY THE MANUFACTURER'S INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE USAGE PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO SPECIFIED PRECAUTIONS

Note:

Dilution rates for disinfectants for use against Foot and Mouth Disease and/or Swine Vesicular Disease relate to effectiveness when applied to a clean surface.

- (a) thoroughly cleansed, ensuring that dung, litter, etc. is removed and disposed of so that there is no risk of contact with livestock; and
 (b) (the clean area) washed or sprayed with an approved disinfectant used at the approved dilution

(---) = Not approved

This list is

provisional.

Products must appear on the biocidal products register before they can legally be used in Ireland.

Forms for notification of biocides are available at www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie. Authorisation of a product must be carried out according to the provisions of the Biocidal Products Regulation (EU) No. 528/2012 as amended by Regulation (EU) No 334/2014.

Notified products included in this list have not been assessed for their efficacy in accordance with Regulation (EU) 528/2012.