

An Update on Avian Influenza and Your Pet

With recent news of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) we've had some questions which we thought we would address here.

What is it and should I be concerned?

- Avian influenza can infect and is a risk to birds but also humans and other mammals (especially primates, ferrets/mustelids, pigs, feline patients).
- There are many subtypes of avian influenza viruses that affect more than 100 bird species worldwide. The most common forms are low pathogenicity (LPAI) and may asymptomatic or present with respiratory or gastrointestinal signs. Ducks, swans, geese, terns, shorebirds serve as natural reservoirs for these viruses and can carry it in their respiratory and gastrointestinal tracts without showing any signs of illness. As wild waterfowl gather for their annual migrations, these viruses can spread quickly within their populations.
- Influenza viruses can jump to new species and constantly change through mutations, which can lead to new strains some of which are more virulent (more severe or harmful in its effects).
- Highly pathogenic avian influenza may cause sudden death without clinical signs, lack of energy and/or appetite, decreased egg production or soft-shelled or misshapen eggs, swelling or discoloration of the head, comb, eyelid, wattles, and hocks, or neurologic signs.
- Those most at risk include people who own or work with poultry, waterfowl, dairy cows, or wild animals, people with exposure to infected animals, or contaminated materials, people who have job-related or recreational exposures to birds or sick or dead mammals, and those who are exposed to or consume raw, unprocessed or undercooked poultry, eggs and dairy products.



What can I do to protect my birds at home?

- Do not keep pets outdoors.
- If you are unable to bring your pets indoors, prevent contact with wild birds and waterfowl by keeping them in a covered enclosure.
- Wash hands before and after contacting poultry.
- Change clothes or wear protective outer garments when working with the birds.
- Set up a foot sanitation station or dedicate a pair of shoes for your outdoor birds only.
- Quarantine of newly acquired birds: New birds should be housed separately from the general population with no contact or shared equipment for at least 6 weeks.
- Monitor for signs of illness: Isolate sick birds and seek veterinary care and testing.
- Clean and disinfect enclosures and equipment regularly.
- Limit visitors: Only allow people caring for the flock (e.g. family, friends) to interact with the birds. Make sure all participants follow biosecurity principles. Avoid having people with separate flocks interact with your flock.
- Prevent movement of birds: Avoid exhibitions/fairs, poultry swaps, poultry shows, and other poultry events.

What precautions is Avian and Exotic Animal Care (AEAC) taking to protect me and my pet from infection?

Here at AEAC, as veterinarians we not only are committed to the health and wellbeing of animals, but we also take an oath of commitment to utilize our knowledge and skills to protect human health by preventing and controlling zoonotic diseases like avian influenza virus (AIV). We have instituted strict biosecurity protocols:

- ALL pets that may be symptomatic for AIV, have spent time outdoors or been possibly exposed are asked to wait in their vehicle for curbside triage/testing prior to building entry. This reduces you and your pets' risk of contact in our waiting area. Telehealth consultation is also available- call if you would like to schedule.
- Pets that fit the curbside criteria that must enter the building will use one of our 2 isolation rooms with external entrances.
- ALL rooms are mopped and sanitized with disinfectants approved for the inactivation of the virus after every appointment.
- Our team will use full personal protective equipment (masks, goggles/glasses, gowns, booties and foot decontamination stations).
- Paperless records and check in and out procedures.
- Cessation of boarding of high-risk patients (poultry, waterfowl, outdoor birds).

What if my flock has experienced sudden deaths or symptoms, I find dead wild birds, or want to submit a body for testing?

- First and foremost, don't panic! Birds may die unexplainably from diseases other than avian influenza. Having more information is the way to prevent, protect, and predict as well as remedy most concerns.

Please contact:

Rollins Laboratory
4400 Reedy Creek Rd
Raleigh, N.C. 27607
Phone: (919) 733-3986

<https://www.ncagr.gov/divisions/veterinary/VetLabFacilities#RollinsLaboratoryRaleigh-2453>

Where can I find more information?

<https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/wildbirds.html>

https://www.aav.org/page/avian_influenza

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/commercial-backyard-flocks>

We are dedicated to the care of your pet! If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to give us a call!

Sincerely,
Avian and Exotic Animal Care

