

13 July 2024

## Information for Wildlife Rehabilitators

NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) continues to respond to an outbreak of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) first detected in the Greater Sydney basin on 19 June 2024.

**Importantly, Australia remains free of H5N1.** The avian influenza H7N8 strain detected in NSW and ACT is NOT the same as the H5N1 strain that is causing concern globally and is not connected to the Victorian outbreak.

Two Emergency Orders [Biosecurity \(Avian Influenza\) Emergency Order \(No 3\) 2024](#) and [Biosecurity-\(Avian-Influenza-ACT-border\)-Emergency-Order-2024](#) have been implemented and remain in effect until 19 December 2024.

Emergency zones are in place for impacted regions in the Greater Sydney Basin, and the NSW/ACT border region. **The movement of birds and bird products into, within, or out of the emergency zones, is prohibited.** Check the interactive map of the zones on the [Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development website](#).

### How is Avian influenza (AI) transmitted?

AI can be spread by movements of infected birds (domestic or wild), through droppings and secretions of infected birds directly or through movement of contaminated objects, clothing or vehicles. Windborne spread from infected large flocks is also possible over shorter distances.

Other animals like cats and dogs can also spread the AI virus if they come in direct contact with [contaminated materials or infected birds](#).

### Signs of Avian Influenza (AI)

AI is a highly contagious viral disease primarily affecting avian species. AI infection in birds can result in variable signs, from no obvious signs to sudden death.

Clinical signs in wild birds are largely neurological, respiratory or gastrointestinal. Wild birds are more likely to show:

- incoordination, tremors, swimming in circles
- twisted necks or other abnormal posture
- inability to stand or fly
- diarrhoea

- difficulty breathing, coughing or sneezing
- swelling around the head, neck and eyes
- cloudiness or change in colour of the eyes
- sudden death

Signs in poultry include:

- sudden increase in bird deaths
- sudden decline in feed and/or water consumption
- unusually quiet birds
- unusually depressed birds
- decreased vocalisation
- Any decline in egg production from normal to cessation
- sudden appearance of pale shell eggs or eggs without shells
- swelling of the head, face, upper neck and feet (Fig 1a and b)
- any birds with darkening of the comb, wattles or legs (Fig 1a and b)
- any birds with nervous signs e.g. head shaking, head and neck tremors, unsteady gait
- abnormal position of head and neck in a reasonable percentage of birds
- respiratory disease e.g. breathing difficulties, coughing, sneezing
- purplish patches on the legs and unfeathered skin
- watery diarrhoea

Some species may not show any signs of disease or show only very mild signs. In some cases, birds may die suddenly without displaying any clinical signs.

More information can be found on the [NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development website](#).



Figure 1a – Bird with a swollen head, combs and wattles, noting the darkened combs and wattles.

**Figure 1b** - Swollen and darkened legs and feet. Image credit: Dr D Swayne, USDA, Iowa State University Department of Veterinary Pathology, Center for Food Security and Public Health (CFSPH), Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP), and Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC).

### Monitoring and care for wild birds in Emergency Zones

Wildlife rehabilitators should follow the guidelines in the [Wildlife Health Australia - High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) and Wildlife In Australia](#) resource.

Ensure that you are following the PPE and biosecurity measures recommended in the toolbox when handling wildlife.

All wildlife in care must be monitored for signs of AI and any suspect cases reported to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Clinical signs in wild birds are largely neurological, respiratory or gastrointestinal. See previous section for Signs of AI in wild birds.

Some species may not show any signs of disease or show only very mild signs. In some cases, birds may die suddenly without displaying any clinical signs or be found dead. If a wild bird suddenly dies but has not previously shown any clinical signs of AI, ensure they are tested immediately.

Veterinarians within and surrounding the immediate Biosecurity Emergency Zones have been sent guidelines and information to assist with the detection of signs of AI in poultry and wild birds.

Several local veterinary hospitals have confirmed they will examine sick birds to determine possible positive detections. Wildlife rehabilitators considering taking a sick bird to a veterinary clinic must phone the clinic in advance to verify onsite procedures.

Information about managing birds from within the EZ requiring veterinary care is available on the [website](#).

### Housing restrictions for wild birds in Emergency Zones

The [Biosecurity \(Avian Influenza\) Emergency Order \(No 3\) 2024](#) requires wild birds in care of wildlife rehabilitators to be housed in a way that prevents contact with other birds.

Feed, water and bedding materials should be controlled to prevent access with other wild birds. Ideally, wild birds should be kept in a secure house or aviary. If this is not possible, netting or similar confinement should be used.

### Can rehabilitated wild birds in care be released into Emergency Zones?

Birds that are showing any signs consistent with AI must not be released and must be reported immediately to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Birds in care must be observed for clinical signs of AI for a minimum of five (5) days. If no signs of AI have developed, the bird may be released within the zone, as close as possible to the location at which it was found.

### Transport and Permits

Birds and poultry can be freely moved and transported in areas unaffected by AI (*Outside Area*). Outside Areas, are those areas located outside of designated REZs and CEZs and are considered low-risk for transmission.

Restrictions on movements apply within designated REZs and CEZs. Check the interactive map on the [NSW DPIRD Avian influenza](#) website to locate your Emergency Zone.

The [NSW DPIRD Explanation Guide](#) provides a full list of movement restrictions.

Movement Permit applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis. Movement Permit applications can be found online at <https://forms.bfs.dpi.nsw.gov.au/forms/22849>.

### Personal risk and protection

Avian Influenza is a highly contagious viral disease that primarily affects bird species. Transmission of AI to humans is rare. There is a very low risk of people becoming infected through normal contact with healthy birds.

You may be at higher risk if you have contact with birds or animals that are infected with AI, or their secretions (saliva, blood and faeces).

Wildlife rehabilitators should always wash their hands with soap and running water after touching or handling birds, their enclosures, environments, or food containers.

Remember, if any birds are unwell or there are any concerns of bird illness, wear appropriate personal protective equipment to reduce your risk of contamination. This includes a P2/N95 mask, goggles, gloves and protective clothing.

For more information on preventing AI in humans, read the [NSW Health avian influenza factsheet](#).

### Wildlife rehabilitators who look after birds and keep their own pet birds at home, should:

Check if their facility, or the staff member's home, is located in an emergency zone using the interactive map on the [Department of Primary Industries website](#).

If the staff members or volunteer's home is in the emergency zone, it is recommended that they avoid contact with their pet birds for 72 hours before and 72 hours after contact with birds (includes handling, feeding, cleaning bird enclosures or touching equipment used for any of these activities).

### Reporting signs of Avian Influenza (AI)

Avian Influenza is a notifiable disease in NSW. If you notice symptoms consistent with AI, you must

report it immediately to the 24-hour *Emergency Animal Disease Hotline* on 1800 675 888 or Local Land Services on 1300 795 299 (during business hours).

More information on Avian Influenza, visit [dpi.nsw.gov.au/ai](https://dpi.nsw.gov.au/ai).

## Resources and information

- [High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) and Wildlife in Australia: A RISK MITIGATION TOOLBOX FOR WILDLIFE MANAGERS](#)
- [High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) and Wildlife in Australia A RISK MITIGATION TOOLBOX FOR WILDLIFE CARE PROVIDERS](#)
- [Avian Influenza in Wild Birds in Australia Oct 2023 \(wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au\)](https://wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au)
- Victorian case information can be found at [Agriculture Victoria website](#).
- Download the *NSW BioResponse* app for up-to-date and accurate information on the response. Download via the App Store (apple.com) or Google Play Store.
- Visit the [NSW DPIRD website](#) or phone the *Emergency Animal Disease Hotline* on 1800 675 888.