

Protecting poultry from bird flu

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With winter approaching, birds are migrating south to escape the cold and take advantage of more abundant food sources.

But birds aren't the only ones taking advantage of this migratory ritual. Avian [influenza viruses](#), more commonly known as bird flu, can spread

across the country if migrating birds carry the viruses with them on their pre-winter journey.

As a result, Dr. Isabelle Louge, a clinical assistant professor at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, advises poultry owners to remain vigilant against the spread of bird flu this winter because it can be deadly for our avian counterparts.

The danger of bird flu

Bird flu typically follows migratory patterns, mainly through waterfowl (ducks and geese) droppings. Yet, Louge says the virus can also spread through infected poultry or people and through contact with contaminated equipment, including clothing and shoes.

"Highly [pathogenic avian influenza](#) (HPAI), or highly contagious bird flu, is a periodic problem in [poultry flocks](#) and is spread both bird-to-bird and when birds come into contact with contaminated objects and surfaces," Louge said. "The past few years have seen outbreaks of HPAI spreading very easily among birds and often causing high losses in a flock."

Because HPAI is contagious, Louge says owners should be familiar with and watch for signs of [bird flu](#). If signs are present, humans and other animals will need to steer clear so that they don't become infected as well.

"The first sign of the disease among poultry is dead birds, but other signs include ruffled feathers, depression, gasping, difficulty breathing, swelling of the head and neck, and diarrhea," Louge said. "The virus that causes [avian influenza](#) also can recombine with other influenza viruses found in humans, pigs, and other species."

If owners find that their birds are exhibiting these symptoms, Louge strongly suggests reporting the outbreak to the state veterinary office or the U.S. Department of Agriculture to receive professional help.

"It is important for all of us to work together to keep the spread under control," Louge said.

In addition, owners should stay up to date with nearby outbreaks so that they can implement [safety measures](#) sooner, preventing the disease from spreading.

"If HPAI has been detected in your area, it is best to keep your flock fully indoors—in a clean, well-ventilated coop with fresh feed and water—to avoid contact with any potential [wild birds](#) that could spread the virus," Louge said.

Preventing flocks from becoming infected

There are various methods, or [biosecurity measures](#), that can help prevent flocks from becoming sick when exposed to new birds. Quarantining new birds from existing flocks is one measure that can keep your birds safe from the virus.

"Owners should quarantine any new poultry brought to the farm for at least 30 days to ensure they are not sick, and they should work with these birds last so that they are clean when working with the home flock," Louge said

Owners should also consider designing outdoor areas to completely exclude access for wild [birds](#), not sharing farm equipment with other poultry farmers, and routinely disinfecting any equipment used around flocks.

Avian influenza can harm poultry flocks, so following biosecurity measures is necessary to keep both you and your [flock](#) safe from illness. Not only are you keeping your farm healthy, but you are helping stop the spread of illness to nearby farms.

Provided by Texas A&M University

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