



**Falkland Islands Government
Environment Department**

Avian Influenza / Bird Flu – Guidance Note for Air-Strip Managers / Operators

26 September 2022

This note is to take the opportunity to make you aware of the of Avian Influenza (bird flu). There are no confirmed outbreaks of bird flu in the Falkland Islands at this stage. However, we must be prepared for a possible bird flu outbreaks ahead of the bird migration in October.

The Environment Department has purchased sufficient biosecurity footbaths for all active FIGAS airstrips and sufficient Virkon for the next 6 months, which is the high-risk period. The equipment is due to arrive soon and the Environment Department will inform you when your equipment is on its way.

The key message at this stage is the need for good biosecurity protocols for when passengers arrive or depart from the air-strip that you manage. This will help protect Falkland Islands wild-life.

Key information for you is below. If you have any questions please feel that you can direct them to the FIG Environment Department or the Falkland Islands Veterinary Services.

What is Bird Flu?

Its full title Avian Influenza, is a virus which causes a disease in birds, including poultry and wild birds.

What is the Risk to the Falkland Islands?

Since the beginning of 2022, the increasing intensity of avian influenza outbreaks has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of seabirds in the Northern Hemisphere, around the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean and Southern Africa. It is possible that avian influenza could arrive in the Falkland Islands. Migrant birds returning from the north and mixing with wild birds in the Falkland Islands could transmit the virus. This coincides with the arrival of penguins and other flying seabirds for the breeding season. This means we must be prepared for a possible bird flu outbreaks ahead of the bird migration in October.

How does Bird Flu spread?

It is spread from bird to bird through contact with infected saliva or droppings. Domestic poultry are susceptible to the virus.

Can Bird Flu affect people?

Very few strains of avian influenza have been recorded as infecting humans, and those which can transmit to humans don't do so easily. The risk to public health during an outbreak is usually extremely low. Those working in close contact with birds, such as with domestic and commercial poultry or bird researchers, have a higher exposure to risk. Bird flu is not transmitted through properly cooked food. Cooked poultry and eggs are safe to eat in areas where outbreaks have occurred. To minimise the risk further, if you do see sick or dead birds, do not touch them, their droppings, or any water nearby.

What should I do if I am an Air-strip Manager/Operator?

The key thing to do as an air-strip manager is ensure that arriving and departing passengers clean and disinfect their foot ware and clean their clothes and bags of any dirt and debris.

- This is preferably done with a Virkon© footbath but you can also use a solution of 3.5% bleach (that is 35ml of bleach mixed in water to make 1ltr total)
- Salt water has also proven to be an effective disinfectant against this current outbreak (in the UK) of Avian Influenza.
- You know your land and Bird colonies well, if you notice any unusual behaviour or deaths of birds (typical symptoms of Bird Flu are detailed below) you can contact the FIG Veterinary Services at: email: -tross@naturalresources@gov.fk telephone: 27366 or out of hours 55366.

What is FIG doing to help Air-Strip managers?

- FIG is currently waiting on a large order of Virkon© and Footbaths to ensure that each air-strip has a healthy stock for the tourist season.
 - While waiting on your delivery of Virkon© and Biosecurity Footbath you can use any container large enough to fit a single boot into as a footbath and a 3.5% solution of bleach, if you don't have bleach then salt water can be used as substitute disinfectant.
 - The Environment Department will inform you when your equipment is on its way.
- FIG is also available to contact if you wish to seek advice on enhanced biosecurity measures that can be taken.
- We have also attached documentation with advice on how to use a Footbath effectively and safely, and how to safely and properly dilute your Virkon©.

Thank you for your support to help protect the Falklands islands wild-life.

Joshua Anderson-Wheatley
Assistant Environmental Officer
Environment Department

Policy & Economic Development | Falkland Islands Government | Stanley | Falkland Islands FIQQ 1ZZ
Phone: +500 28449 | Email: Environmental.assistant@sec.gov.fk Web: www.fig.gov.fk/policy

What are the typical symptoms of Bird Flu?

The symptoms of bird flu in wild birds and poultry include:

- Loss of coordination and balance,
- Trembling head and body,
- Sudden and rapid increase in the number of birds found dead,
- Swollen head,
- Closed and excessively watery eyes,
- Lethargy and depression, unresponsiveness, lying down, drooping wings, dragging legs,
- Twisting of the head and neck,
- Respiratory distress such as gasping, nasal snicking sneezing, gurgling or rattling,
- Discoloured or loose watery droppings, bright green in some species.