



Falkland Islands Government Environment Department

Avian Influenza / Bird Flu – Guidance Note For Field Science Researchers (Research Licence Holders)

26 September 2022

This note is to take the opportunity to make you aware of the environmental risk of Avian Influenza (bird flu). At this stage field science research can proceed but this may change if an outbreak of avian influenza is confirmed within the Falkland Islands. This could result in closing specific sites or stopping all land-based field research activities.

The key message at this stage is the need for good biosecurity protocols for when you enter the field, moving between sites and on returning to and from Stanley or accommodation within Camp or Settlements.

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 a Science Field Worker or Researcher handling wild birds?

At this stage, field research can proceed.

- This may change if an outbreak of avian influenza is confirmed and specific sites may be closed for access or all field research stopped.
- All scientists working in the field and with wild birds must apply high standards of biosecurity measures before entering a wild bird colony.
- On departure from the field research site all equipment must be cleaned and disinfected and clothes wash.
- All scientists working in the field and with wild birds should not mix with poultry, this is to reduce any risk of virus transfer from wild birds to poultry.

Field Biosecurity. What does biosecurity mean?

- For avian influenza, biosecurity refers to procedures used to prevent the introduction and spread of disease-causing organisms to your birds/flock.
- Good biosecurity is the essential defence against diseases such as avian influenza and is key to limiting the spread of avian influenza in an outbreak.
- Good biosecurity measures will include boot scrubbing and dipping in a footbath with a biocide such as Virkon. The Veterinary Services can be contacted for further advice.

Enhanced Biosecurity measures. What does this mean?

Prior to landing or entering a site of wildlife / bird colony you are to:

- Take extra caution when cleaning any clothing or equipment which has been used in other wildlife areas especially at Northern hemisphere sites where bird flu has been confirmed or suspected.
- It is recommended that boots and outwear clothing are disinfected. First all biological material should be removed (seeds, vegetation) and mud, then a Virkon disinfectant solution used. If you don't have Virkon then please use a soap solution followed by a 3.5% bleach solution.
- If clothing or equipment cannot be adequately cleaned, it should not be brought to the Falkland Islands or used in the field when conducting research.
- Conduct an observation period for at least 10 minutes prior to entering an area with wild birds or a seabird nesting colony. Do not enter if mass mortality or signs of bird flu are noted.
- Do not sit on the ground and minimise equipment brought onto the site. Consider having a location to store equipment external to the wild bird site / research site. Additional clothing, emergency equipment, food and water and items not required

for the field research should be kept outside the wild bird site. A distance of 100 meters would be recommended. This will reduce risk of transfer of faecal material to equipment. This does not remove the need to sanitise and decontaminate items after exiting the field site.

- If you are required to approach seabirds / wild birds / wildlife animals closer than 5m or undertake any animal handling, you should practice the following:
 - Wear appropriate PPE including face masks (these can be washable or disposable), disposal overalls or outerwear (PVC waterproof type outer wear) that can be decontaminated with Virkon, and then machine washed at temperatures above 60°C as soon as is possible, gloves (washable, or wipe clean with a disinfectant or disposable), safety glasses,
 - Be appropriately trained in working with potential infectious animals, and to correctly wear, remove and dispose of adapted PPE,
 - Not move between bird colonies / areas of high sea bird density without first fully decontaminating all clothing and equipment,
 - Clean all clothing and equipment before progressing to the next site ensuring all biological material is removed and surfaces disinfected with Virkon or a bleach solution,
 - Allowing items to dry is best practice,
 - If it is practical to clean boots before returning to the accommodation (building or even boat or yacht). This can be difficult in the field with limited resources, washing boots in sea water is an excellent option. Another good option is to bag the boots used on the seabird site and change into clean walking boots. On return to accommodation to then thoroughly clean both sets of walking boots. Wellies are ideal footwear as they can be easily cleaned.

- These measures are to protect individuals from the risk of infection from bird flu. Researchers who have close contact with birds have a higher exposure to risk. These measures will also mitigate the risk of transfer of bird flu to another seabird colony.

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