



Information Campaign Falkland Islands Avian Influenza – Bird Flu

Veterinary Services and Environment Department

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 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.

Is it safe to visit Camp?

At this stage there is no evidence of Avian Influenza within our wild or domestic bird populations. It is safe for tourists and the local community to visit the countryside. If this changes you will be informed. The Falkland Islands Government Veterinary Services will respond to any reports of unusual wild bird deaths. The situation will be continually monitored and assessed.

How damaging is Bird Flu to our wild birds?

The potential impact to Falkland Islands wildlife birds is significant. In the UK and generally the Northern Hemisphere there has been an unprecedented series of outbreaks, which has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of seabirds.

How long does the Avian Influenza virus survive in the environment?

The disease spreads by movement of infected birds, and from bird to bird by contact with contaminated body material, fluids, and

faeces, either directly or through contaminated objects and surfaces. Avian Influenza isn't typically considered to be an airborne disease. At low temperatures, the virus can survive for days, weeks, or even months in the environment. The virus also survives longer in ponds and damp environments. But this is also dependant on virus strain, the surface type, and other variables.

What should you do if you see any signs of Bird Flu in wild birds?

If any of these signs are noted or there is concern of mass mortality at the site:

- Do not approach the site or make landings.
- Do not touch birds.
- Do not collect dead birds unless specifically tasked to do this.
- Report your observations to the Veterinary Services - see details 'How do I report? And who do I contact?'
- Ensure all clothing, boots and equipment is cleaned and sanitized.
- Do not travel to or enter another bird colony or poultry flocks.

What should you do if you see any signs of Bird Flu in your poultry?

- Do not touch the birds or collect eggs.
- Do not pick up any dead or sick birds.
- Report your observations to the Veterinary Services - see details 'How do I report? And who do I contact?'
- Ensure all clothing, boots and equipment is cleaned and sanitized.
- Do not travel to or enter another bird colony or poultry flocks.

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.

What is the Falkland Islands Government doing?

- FIG is constantly assessing the situation for Avian Influenza.
- FIG will keep the public informed and updated.
- Additional biosecurity measures will be implemented.
- Additional biosecurity equipment has been procured.

How do I report? And who do I contact?

If you see any unusual wild bird or domestic/commercial poultry behaviour report these using the reporting template on the FIG website or contact the Veterinary Services on: email – tross@naturalresources@gov.fk telephone: 27366 or out of hours 55366.

How do I get more information? For more information or to download the reporting template visit the Environment Department website:

<https://www.falklands.gov.fk/policy/environment/avian-influenza>

Or veterinary services; <https://www.falklands.gov.fk/agriculture/publications/general>