

Chief Vet warns poultry keepers in Suffolk to take urgent action now or risk losing flocks to bird flu

The UK's Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss is today urging poultry keepers in Suffolk to step up their efforts in the fight against bird flu following a recent spike of cases in the county.

In the last month alone, there have been five new infected premises confirmed in Suffolk with highly pathogenic avian influenza. The warning comes as the UK faces its largest ever outbreak of bird flu with over 100 cases confirmed since the start of November.

The Government introduced housing measures in November 2021 to minimise the disease spreading. This means that if you keep chickens, ducks, geese or any other birds you are legally required to keep them indoors and to follow strict biosecurity measures. If you do not do this, the disease could kill your birds and you could be prosecuted. These measures apply to all bird keepers whether you keep birds commercially or have a single pet chicken.

Wild birds spread the disease so it is vital to not allow wild birds to mix with your chickens, ducks, geese or other birds.

People can also spread the disease on their clothes and shoes so before going into bird enclosures you should wash your hands, and change or clean and disinfect your footwear.

The UK Health Security Agency has confirmed that the risk to public health is very low and the Food Standards Agency has said that bird flu poses a very low food safety risk for UK consumers, and it does not affect the consumption of poultry or eggs.

The Chief Veterinary Officer is reminding all poultry keepers that whilst the main source of infection comes from migratory wild birds, those failing to implement these measures risk infecting their own flocks by walking the virus into their holdings.

Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss said:

We have taken swift action to limit the spread of the disease including by introducing housing measures. However we are still seeing a number of bird flu cases both on commercial farms and in backyard birds right across Suffolk.

Many poultry keepers in Suffolk have excellent biosecurity standards but the number of cases we are seeing suggests that not enough is being done by all bird keepers to keep bird flu out. Whether you keep just a few birds or thousands, you must take

action now to protect your birds from this highly infectious disease.

The avian flu outbreak has not gone away and implementing scrupulous biosecurity remains absolutely critical. You must continue to regularly clean and disinfect your footwear and clothes before entering enclosures, stop your birds mixing with any wild birds and only allow visitors that are strictly necessary. It is your actions that will help keep your birds safe.

Poultry keepers must do the following:

- house or net all poultry and captive birds to keep them separate from wild birds;
- cleanse and disinfect clothing, equipment and vehicles before and after contact with poultry and captive birds – if practical, use disposable protective clothing;
- where possible change their footwear before entering sheds housing poultry and captive birds. If not, then ensure they are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected;
- reduce the movement of people, vehicles or equipment to and from areas where poultry and captive birds are kept, to minimise contamination from manure, slurry and other products, and use effective vermin control;
- thoroughly cleanse and disinfect housing on a continuous basis;
- keep fresh disinfectant at the right concentration at all farm and poultry housing entry and exit points; and
- minimise direct and indirect contact between poultry and captive birds and wild birds, including making sure all feed and water is not accessible to wild birds.
- Store bedding so that it cannot be contaminated by wild birds.
- Ensure appropriate rodent control is in place in all areas where birds are kept, in addition to any areas where the birds bedding or feed is kept.

Poultry and captive bird keepers must be vigilant for any signs of disease in their birds and any wild birds, and seek prompt advice from their vet if they have any concerns.

We would encourage all keepers to [register their flocks with us](#). This is a legal requirement if you have 50 birds or more. Registering with us means that we will be able to contact you with information or action required should an outbreak happen near you.

Do not touch or pick up any dead or sick birds that you find. If you find dead swans, geese or ducks or other dead wild birds, such as gulls or birds of prey, you should report them to the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77. For further information see our advice to the public.

Bird keepers should report suspicion of disease in England to Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301, in Wales contact 0300 303 8268. In Scotland, contact your local Field Services Office. In Northern Ireland

contact DAERA on 0300 200 7840. Keepers should familiarise themselves with our avian flu advice.