

# [News story: Avian influenza \(bird flu\) in winter 2017 to 2018](#)

Avian influenza (bird flu) is a disease of birds. The UK is currently free from bird flu, but there is a constant risk the disease may arrive and all poultry keepers should review their biosecurity, sign up for disease alerts and register their birds with APHA. Keepers are reminded that they must report any unexplained deaths or sickness to their vet.

## **Current situation**

The H5N8 strain of bird flu is currently circulating in Europe, with recent cases in poultry and wild birds in Italy, wild birds in Germany and poultry in Bulgaria.

The current risk of incursion in the UK is medium for wild birds and low for poultry, although this depends on levels of biosecurity on individual premises. This is because the wild bird migration season is well under way, bringing birds from areas where we know bird flu is present to the UK for the winter.

Read more about the current situation in the latest [veterinary outbreak assessment](#).

## **What to do if you keep poultry and captive birds**

If you keep poultry – whether that’s a few birds in your garden or a large commercial flock – you should take steps now to review your biosecurity, register your birds with APHA, sign up for [disease alerts](#) and report any sick birds.

### **Review your biosecurity**

Bird flu is spread by direct contact between birds and through contamination in the environment, for example in bird droppings. This means wild birds carrying the disease can infect domestic poultry, so the best way to reduce the risk of your poultry catching bird flu is to minimise chances for them to come into contact with wild birds or their droppings by practising good biosecurity.

You should review your biosecurity measures now, as the risk level may increase in the coming weeks. This means reading government guidance on good biosecurity and taking action to:

- Minimise movement in and out of your bird enclosure.
- Clean footwear before and after visiting your birds.
- Keep bird enclosures clean and tidy and regularly disinfecting any hard surfaces.

- Humanely control rats and mice.
- Place birds' food and water in fully-enclosed areas that wild birds cannot access, and remove any spilled feed.
- Keep your birds separate from wildlife and wild waterfowl by putting suitable fencing around the outdoor areas they access.
- Make sure equipment, feed and bedding are stored undercover so they cannot be contaminated by wild birds.
- Where possible keep chickens and turkeys separate from ducks and geese.

Read and download our [advice poster for keepers of poultry](#) (PDF, 1 page).

## **Register your birds**

All keepers are encouraged to register their birds with Defra so we can contact you quickly if there is a disease outbreak in your area and you need to take action. If you have more than 50 birds, you are legally required to register your flock within one month of their arrival at your premises. [Find out how to register your birds](#).

## **Report signs of disease**

If you suspect disease in your own flock, or you find dead wild birds such as wild ducks, wild geese, swans, gulls or birds of prey, you must let Defra know. Call the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77.

## **Sign up for disease alerts**

By signing up to the [free disease alert system](#) you will get text alerts and emails informing you of the latest news about bird flu and Newcastle disease outbreaks in Great Britain.

## **Further information**

## **Recent announcements on avian influenza**