

## [News story: Avian Influenza: UK now disease-free but Chief Vet urges vigilance](#)

The Government Chief Vet has today announced the UK has met international requirements to declare itself free from Avian Influenza (AI) H5N8, but reiterated calls for all poultry keepers to remain vigilant for signs of disease, as there is a real and constant threat.

The disease continues to circulate in Europe and as winter approaches the risk of migratory wild birds infecting domestic poultry will rise. The UK was previously declared free of Avian Flu in April 2016 but the disease returned in December that year – so the government is not complacent.

Declaring the UK free from AI means trade discussions on UK poultry and poultry products can restart with existing and potential new trading partners.

Between December 2016 and June 2017, 13 cases of AI were confirmed in kept poultry in the UK. In all cases, the Animal and Plant Health Agency put movement restrictions in place to limit the spread of disease and carried out thorough investigations into the source and possible spread of infection. The government also introduced UK-wide measures to protect poultry from infection from wild birds, including a requirement to temporarily house birds and a ban on bird gatherings.

Today Chief Veterinary Officer Nigel Gibbens urged keepers to remain vigilant for signs of disease as winter approaches and [reiterated the need for good biosecurity](#) at all times:

Declaring the UK free from avian flu is an important milestone that will help our efforts to re-open export markets. The past nine months have been very challenging for all those who keep poultry, and I would like to thank everyone for their efforts in helping us contain the disease to a handful of premises.

However, I urge all keepers to be vigilant – there is a constant risk of avian flu from wild birds and this is likely to increase as winter approaches, temperatures fall, and migratory birds arrive in the UK.

All poultry keepers should take steps to reduce the risk to their birds, such as cleaning footwear, feeding birds indoors, and minimising contact with wild birds. Building these simple actions into routines now can help prepare for any future outbreaks.

H5N8 avian flu was confirmed at commercial premises in Suffolk, Lancashire

and Lincolnshire, and in backyard flocks in Northumberland, Lancashire, Norfolk, North Yorkshire and Carmarthenshire. The same strain of the virus was also found in wild birds in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The government continues to carry out surveillance in poultry and wild birds and publish regular disease updates.

## **Further information**

- Under World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) rules, three months must elapse from the application of measures to prevent the spread of disease or cleansing and disinfection of the last infected premises before a country can be declared disease-free. The last case of AI in the UK was confirmed on 2 June, and cleansing and disinfection completed on 14 June 2017. Countries are required to fulfil a number of requirements on biosecure disposal of carcasses, the application of effective disinfection and surveillance.
- The UK CV0 will declare on the UK's behalf by submitting an evidence paper to OIE for publication on the OIE WAHIS website alongside other countries that have already self-declared.
- Following an exotic disease outbreak, it is routine practice in the UK to evaluate the response and identify lessons for future outbreaks. A [report summarising lessons from the 2016/17 AI outbreak](#) is published today.
- Read and download [our advice poster for keepers of poultry](#) (PDF, 1 page).