

News story: Update on biosecurity measures to protect against Avian Flu

The government has today set out initial plans to update temporary measures in place to reduce the risk of avian flu in England, after the current Prevention Zone expires on 28 February 2017.

Based on the latest situation and current scientific advice from the Chief Veterinary Officer, from 28 February the government anticipates [adopting a more targeted approach with mandatory biosecurity measures](#) across the country and continued housing or range netting in higher risk areas. These measures would be reviewed at the end of April.

Currently, anyone who keeps poultry or captive birds is required by law to house them, or otherwise keep them separate from wild birds, to reduce the risk of disease spreading. This requirement remains in place until 28 February and guidance on how to comply is [available online](#).

The proposed temporary measures are designed so keepers can allow birds outside from 28 February, whilst still taking reasonable precautions against avian flu during the current outbreak. A final decision will be confirmed at the end of February.

Public Health England advises that the risk to public health from avian flu is very low and the Food Standards Agency has said there is no food safety risk for UK consumers.

Chief Veterinary Officer Nigel Gibbens said:

Effective disease control will always be our priority. Based on the current situation, we believe mandatory biosecurity across England, combined with targeted housing or range netting in higher risk areas, is the best option to control disease, protect birds' welfare and ensure consumers can buy free range products.

We have acted swiftly to limit the spread of H5N8, including requiring all birds to be housed or kept separate from wild birds. The twelve week housing requirement has allowed keepers time to introduce stricter biosecurity measures and our intention now is to lift this from 28 February. Current rules on housing still remain in place until then, but we are setting out plans now to give people time to prepare. We will keep this decision under review.

H5N8 continues to circulate in wild birds and poultry keepers must remain vigilant. This proposal does not mean a return to business as usual and we will continue to do everything we can to reduce the risk from this disease.

Updated measures from 28 February 2017

From 28 February all keepers of poultry and other captive birds must [continue to follow Defra's guidance on maintaining good biosecurity](#) and keep a close watch on the health of their birds.

All keepers of poultry and captive birds must also continue to keep their birds separate from wild birds. They will be able to do so in one of the following ways:

- Housing – keepers in all areas of England may choose to keep their birds housed. Eggs and some poultry from these birds will no longer be free range.
- Total netting / aviaries / covered runs – keepers in all areas of England may construct covered runs or use netting to keep birds separate from wild birds. Eggs and poultry from these birds will be free range provided they meet all other criteria.
- Supervised access to enclosed outdoor areas – keepers outside the 'higher risk areas' will be able to allow birds outside, provided certain strict biosecurity conditions are met. Eggs and poultry from these birds will be free range provided they meet all other criteria.

Poultry keepers with more than 1,000 birds will have to meet additional biosecurity measures including identifying clearly defined areas where access is limited and vehicles, equipment and footwear must be disinfected.

Anyone planning to allow their birds outdoors from 28 February must take action now to reduce the risk of infection from birds being let outside by [following guidance published today](#).

We are working with industry on ways to robustly enforce these measures. Outbreaks cause birds to suffer, damage businesses and cost the UK taxpayer millions. Due to the significant potential impact of disease spread, we expect a high level of compliance from all poultry and captive bird keepers.

Higher Risk Areas

While the risk of H5N8 remains high across the country, areas close to substantial inland or coastal bodies of water, where significant numbers of wild birds collect, are at an even higher risk. In these areas, the risk is considered too great to move to the alternative biosecurity package and compulsory housing or total netting will continue to be mandatory.

We have published guidance to indicate where these areas are likely to be, based on current risk levels, to allow keepers time to prepare. We expect around 75 per cent of poultry keepers to be unaffected. An interactive map will be available from tomorrow which will show, in detail, locations likely

to be designated as higher risk.

In these higher risk areas, where keepers choose to house birds rather than net them, eggs and some poultry from these birds will no longer be classed as free range.

Background information

- [H5N8 Avian Flu has been confirmed](#) at three linked premises on a commercial game farm in Lancashire, at three separate poultry farms in Lincolnshire and in backyard flocks in North Yorkshire and Carmarthenshire.
- The [current housing restrictions under the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone \(AIPZ\)](#) will expire on 28 February 2017 twelve weeks after their introduction on 6 December 2016. Under EU regulations, birds can be housed for up to twelve weeks and their produce be called free range. Above twelve weeks, products from these birds can no longer be called free range if they are still housed.
- The [measures set out today](#) are proposed based on current levels of disease risk and scientific advice. Measures may change between now and 28 February, but keepers should use the measures set out now for planning purposes.