

Poultry farmers and pet bird keepers urged to prepare for winter Avian Flu threat

Since June 2017, there have been no detections of avian influenza in poultry or kept birds in the UK and the UK has retained its OIE country freedom status since September 2017.

There are some simple measures that all bird keepers, whether they are running a large commercial farm, keeping a few birds in their back garden or rearing game birds, should take to protect their animals against the threat of avian influenza in the coming winter months. These include:

- keep the area where birds live clean and tidy, control rats and mice and regularly disinfect any hard surfaces. Clean footwear before and after visits.
- place birds' feed and water in fully enclosed areas that are protected from wild birds, and remove any spilled feed regularly.
- put fencing around outdoor areas where birds are allowed and limit their access to ponds or areas visited by wild waterfowl.
- where possible, avoid keeping ducks and geese with other poultry species
- for poultry keepers in England, Wales and Scotland, sign up to a free APHA service to receive text or email alerts to any outbreaks of bird flu in the UK. In Northern Ireland, all bird keepers are encouraged to subscribe to a free text alert service by simply texting 'BIRDS' to 67300.

These measures are particularly important if you are in or close to one of the GB Higher Risk Areas. You can check whether or not you are in a Higher Risk Area by using our interactive maps.

A joint statement by all four of the Chief Veterinary Officers in the UK today said:

“Avian flu continues to circulate in many parts of the world and with the colder months soon upon us the risk of disease from migrating birds is increasing. It is critical that all keepers of poultry, including game birds and pet birds, act now to reduce the risk of transmission of avian flu to their flocks.

“Good biosecurity should be maintained at all times, including regularly cleaning and disinfecting the area where you keep birds and separating them from wild birds wherever possible.

“Keepers should also ensure they register on the Great Britain

Poultry Register and we are pleased that new forms are now in place to simplify this process. Keepers in Northern Ireland must register their birds on the DAERA Bird Register. This can now be completed and submitted on-line”

All bird keepers across Great Britain should also register their birds on the Great Britain Poultry Register (GBPR). If you have 50 or more birds, this is a legal requirement, although keepers with fewer than 50 birds are also strongly encouraged to register. New simplified and user-friendly forms will speed up the process this year.

In Northern Ireland it is a legal requirement for all bird keepers to register every bird on the DAERA Bird Register, other than pet birds kept in the owner’s home.

Registering your birds means the government can contact you in the case of an outbreak and provide information on the steps to take to limit the chances of your birds getting the disease.

Last winter, the H5N6 HPAI strain of bird flu was only detected in wild birds and there were no outbreaks in domestic birds, either in commercial or small holdings. Although there have been no findings in the UK since June 2018 the virus is still circulating in wild birds in North Europe (including Denmark and Germany) and has caused outbreaks in poultry. In addition, the H5N8 HPAI virus continues to circulate in Eastern Europe, highlighting the need to stay vigilant.

The Government continues to monitor for incursions of avian flu and is working with the poultry and game bird industries; hen rehoming and pure and traditional poultry breeds stakeholders to help prevent incursions.