

Poultry keepers – Act now to reduce your risk from bird flu this winter

The UK's Chief Veterinary Officers are encouraging poultry keepers to take action now to reduce the risk of avian flu over the winter.

The UK is currently free from avian flu, but over the last year 26 outbreaks were confirmed in kept poultry and captive birds and in over 300 wild birds. As winter approaches, the risk of migratory wild birds infecting domestic poultry will rise and therefore it is vital that poultry farmers and bird keepers take action to improve biosecurity standards.

In a joint statement, the UK's four Chief Veterinary Officers said:

Avian flu is a continued threat to all poultry keepers, and as winter approaches we need to be ready for the increased risk of disease that migrating birds pose to our flocks.

We encourage keepers across the UK to implement strong biosecurity practices now, including regular shed maintenance checks, cleaning and disinfecting footwear and signing up for our email and text alerts. Making these tasks a regular fixture of your disease control plans now will make a significant difference in the fight against avian flu this winter and for years to come.

There are several measures that can help to keep flocks disease free. All keepers – whether they run a large commercial farm or keep just a few pet chickens in their back garden – can get ahead of the game and take these steps to reduce the risk of disease before the migration of wild birds begins again this winter:

- Keep the area where birds live clean and tidy, control rats and mice and regularly clean and disinfect any hard surfaces
- Keep chickens and turkeys completely separate from ducks and geese
- Conduct regular maintenance checks on their sheds
- Clean moss off the roofs, empty gutters and remove vegetation between sheds where birds are kept
- Draw up contingency plans for storing bedding and dealing with pests
- 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
- Clean and disinfect footwear before and after entering premises where birds are kept

Jane Howorth, founder of the British Hen Welfare Trust said:

For those of us that enjoy keeping a few pet hens in our gardens, now is the time to start gearing up to protect them during the migration season when avian flu becomes more of a threat. It's no more taxing than having to book any other family pet in for an annual health check, but is so important both for the safety of your own birds as well as that of the national commercial flock.

You will find lots of advice and information on how best to help your birds on our website at www.bhwt.org.uk.

When avian flu is suspected or confirmed, the Government introduces restrictions on the movement of all birds and products of animal origin around the infected premises. These restrictions also impact farms in the surrounding area. In order to minimise this impact, they can take the following steps:

- Ensure robust contingency and business continuity plans are developed and reviewed for managing your premises in the event of avian flu – including for housing birds, appropriate arrangements for bedding management, vermin and pest control
- Ensure production records – including for farm movements, water intake and egg production – are up-to-date, easily accessible and preferably electronic
- Be ready to submit licensing requests for when planning to move birds, vehicles or feed, and have plans in place in case of delays

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 reduce the risk of disease.

The Government also publishes [further guidance](#) on how to spot avian flu and what to do if you suspect it.