

Press release: Poultry keepers urged to take action now to prepare for winter Avian Flu threat

All poultry keepers across the UK are being urged to remain vigilant to the threat of bird flu and take action now to reduce the risk to their flocks and the wider poultry industry this winter in a joint call from the Chief Vets of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the UK.

Simple measures 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 simple steps to reduce the risk of disease before autumn migration of ducks and geese begins again this winter:

- 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' food 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.
- In Great Britain, stay alert by signing up online to a free service to receive text or email alerts on any outbreaks of bird flu in the UK. You can also quickly and easily register your flock online. In Northern Ireland, visit the DAERA website for further information.

Last winter, the H5N8 strain of bird flu was found in 13 kept flocks in the UK – ranging in size from as few as nine to as many as 65,000 birds. We have seen a decline in the number of new cases over the summer, but the disease is still circulating in kept poultry across Europe, with Italy the most recent country to suffer a series of outbreaks. It has also recently been confirmed in a dead mute swan in Norfolk.

Government is working with groups including NFUs in England and Scotland, the UFU, RSPCA, British Hen Welfare Trust and Poultry Club of Great Britain to highlight the importance of keeping up high biosecurity even though the immediate disease risk has dropped.

Together, the groups are also keen to highlight the impact of bird flu on the poultry industry – a case in a backyard flock leads to the same trade

restrictions in an area as an outbreak on a commercial farm, so protecting chickens in a back garden from the disease also protects farmers locally and nationally.

The UK's Chief Veterinary Officer, Nigel Gibbens, said:

While it is undoubtedly good news we haven't confirmed a case in kept birds in the UK for two months, the disease remains a threat – particularly as we move again towards the colder months.

For that reason we cannot afford to rest on our laurels and I want to remind keepers of flocks large and small to do everything they can to reduce the risk to their birds.

Simple actions you can take now, such as regularly cleaning and disinfecting the area where you keep your birds and signing up for free disease alerts, could really help to reduce the risk of your birds becoming infected this winter.

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop said:

While I am sure this lack of new outbreaks will be welcomed by poultry and other captive bird keepers of both large and small flocks I would remind everyone it is vital they continue to be vigilant for signs of disease and maintain excellent biosecurity practices.

If you are concerned about the health of your birds you should seek advice from your veterinary surgeon and if you suspect that your birds have AI, you should report it to your local Animal and Plant Health Agency office.

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland, Sheila Voas, said:

Given the constant risk of bird flu in the UK from wild birds, I would urge bird keepers to take some simple actions now to help reduce the chance of their birds becoming infected. These could include steps to reduce contact with wild birds, particularly on ponds and other water bodies.

One of the main challenges government faced during last year's avian influenza outbreak was being able to contact bird keepers with small numbers of birds. To stay up to date with the latest situation I would encourage bird keepers – including those who are already on the GB Poultry Register – to sign up for the Animal and Plant Health Agency free text alerts service.

Northern Ireland's Chief Veterinary Officer, Robert Huey, said:

While I welcome the lack of new outbreaks across the UK, the risk of avian influenza remains a real and constant threat. That is why it is essential that bird keepers maintain effective biosecurity all year round, not only when a prevention zone is in place.

Poultry and other bird keepers in Northern Ireland are also reminded that their birds must be registered with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. This will ensure they can be contacted quickly in an avian disease outbreak, enabling them to protect their flock at the earliest opportunity.

Given the recent outbreaks in wild birds in Norfolk and on the continent, there is every likelihood the disease will return this winter. Last year's outbreak is believed to have been transmitted via migratory wild birds, which means keepers need to be aware of the danger of contact between wild and kept birds and take action now.

All keepers in Great Britain can stay up to date with the latest situation by [signing up for the Animal and Plant Health Agency's free alerts service](#).

1. [A cross-Government and industry poster outlining biosecurity advice can be downloaded from GOV.UK](#).
2. Avian flu has been confirmed in [13 kept flocks and over 40 wild birds](#) between December 2016 and July 2017.
3. For more advice and regular updates on the latest situation, visit Governments' avian flu pages: in [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [NI](#)
4. In GB, you need to [register if you keep more than 50 birds](#).
5. In Northern Ireland if you keep any birds, other than pet birds kept in the owner's home, you need to [make sure they are registered](#).
6. For more information about this press release, please contact the Defra press office on 020 8225 7318.

[Press release: Courts issue £177,720](#)

[in penalties to anglers](#)

The Environment Agency revealed it prosecuted 691 people for angling offences throughout April, May and June 2017. In total, courts imposed penalties of £177,720, with the highest being £974. Some 314 offenders received penalties of over £300, ten times the price of a year's legal fishing.

The most common offence was fishing without a valid licence, which could see offenders landing fines of up to £2,500 and a criminal conviction. Other offences included removing coarse fish contrary to national byelaws put in place to protect fish stocks. During the restricted period the Environment Agency carried out 17,589 fishing licence checks and issued 963 offence reports.

Kevin Austin, our new Deputy Director for Fisheries at the Environment Agency said:

The Environment Agency and its partners take unlicensed angling very seriously. While only a minority of anglers seek to evade the law and do not buy a licence if only 5% of anglers didn't buy a £30 annual licence this would represent a loss of around £1.5m to the sport and to the environment.

Anyone fishing without a licence can expect to be prosecuted, fined and face having a criminal conviction. Obtaining a fishing licence is easier than ever and costs from just £30 for the year and remember that the junior licence is now free – there is no excuse.

Anyone who suspects illegal fishing to be taking place should report the matter to the Environment Agency's incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

[Press release: CMA makes switching easier for 700,000 UK energy customers](#)

New CMA measures will help 700,000 restricted meter customers, including around 400,000 in Scotland, to switch without changing their meter.

This follows an extensive investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) into the energy sector, which found that around two thirds of restricted meter customers could save an average of £154 per year by switching energy tariff.

In the past, the cost and hassle of changing their meter could have proved a major barrier for many of these people to switch to a cheaper deal. However, the CMA's new measures mean that restricted meter customers can now more easily access a wide range of different deals and rates.

The CMA is also demanding that suppliers offer:

- reminders about switching, via bills,
- contact details for Citizens Advice or Citizens Advice Scotland (as appropriate), and
- further information to assist them with switching (eg their total consumption, their consumption levels by register, their meter type, their current tariff type).

To help people with restricted meters to get the best deal on their energy, the CMA has made the additional recommendation that Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland become recognised providers of information and support to these customers. Both agencies have now confirmed that they will implement this recommendation.

CMA Director of Remedies Susannah Meeke said:

We want to help as many people as possible to shop around for the best energy deal for them. But, many people on restricted meters have effectively been prevented from doing this because they would need to change their meter – which is both costly and a hassle.

Now they will be able to switch like any other energy customer – and potentially lower their bill by up to £154 a year.

We welcome the fact that Citizens Advice is now offering additional information and support for these customers to help them explore their options.

Notes for editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law. For more information on the CMA see our [homepage](#) or follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Flickr](#) and [LinkedIn](#).
2. Restricted meters are those which apply different rates across different times of the day. Examples of affected energy customers include those with Economy 10 and THTC meters.
3. Suppliers with fewer than 50,000 customers do not have to accept restricted meter customers, although they may choose to do so. A large majority of suppliers have more than 50,000 customers.
4. Media enquiries should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk or call: 07774 134814

[Press release: New opportunities for councils to benefit from growth](#)

Councils are being encouraged to join forces and put forward proposals to retain the growth in their business rates income as the Secretary for Communities and Local Government Sajid Javid announces new pilots today (1 September 2017).

From April 2018, pilots across economic areas will be able to retain 100% of the growth in income raised locally through business rates, responding to council calls to reduce local government's dependence on central government.

Findings from this tranche of pilots will then help develop options for local authorities to retain more of the money they raise in the future.

This move builds on previous pilots originally launched in Liverpool, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, West of England, Cornwall and Greater London in April 2017, which will also continue into next year.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I am committed to helping local authorities control more of the money they raise locally,

By encouraging councils to work together, with the aim of sharing their business rates income, it enables them to take a much more strategic view on decisions that benefit the wider area.

Expanding the pilot programme is an opportunity to consider how rates retention could operate across the country and we will continue to work closely with local government to agree the best way forward.

Working together to boost growth

Proposals will need to promote sustainability and collaborative working to promote growth and councils working together to 'pool' their business rates, particularly groups of districts who are proposing to work with their county, will be viewed more favourably.

The government is also keen to spread the pilots across the country, with a focus on rural areas, to ensure that more can be learnt about the scheme in different places.

Alongside the 2018 to 2019 pilots, the government will continue to work with

local authorities, the Local Government Association, and others on reform options that give local authorities more control over the money they raise and are sustainable in the long term.

Further information

The deadline for proposals is Friday 27 October – details can be found on Gov.uk

Successful pilots will be announced in December 2017 and the department will support authorities in preparing for implementation in April 2018.

Pilot local authorities will retain 100% of the growth in their business rates income in the year of the pilot (2018 to 2019), meaning that the central government share (usually 50% of the growth) will stay in the local area.

The pilot programme will not affect funding to other, non-pilot, local authorities. There is already a system of redistributing funding between councils to ensure that areas with lower business rates income do not lose out.

[Press release: Social housing regulator issues guidance on fees](#)

In the run up to the introduction of fees for social housing regulation from October 2017, the regulator of social housing has published fees guidance for registered providers and will be issuing invoices from 4 September.

It has also published terms of reference for a new Fees and Resources Advisory Panel which will meet for the first time in October to enable engagement on fees with a range of stakeholders, and provide transparency.

The regulator was granted powers to charge fees under the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. It set out initial proposals in a discussion paper in 2014 and held a statutory consultation at the end of 2016, consulting extensively with sector representative bodies.

The new fees regime will include:

- a one-off flat-rate registration fee of £2,500 for successful registration with the regulator
- a fixed annual fee of £300 for providers with fewer than 1,000 social housing units

- an annual per unit fee for large providers with 1,000 or more social housing units, for 2017/18 this will be £4.72

Due to the decision to start charging fees from 1 October 2017, 50% of the annual fee is payable for 2017/18.

Julian Ashby, Chair of the HCA Regulation Committee said:

Following extensive consultation with the social housing sector, we undertook to make some changes to the initial proposals. This included delaying the introduction of fees to October 2017 and setting up a Fees and Resources Advisory Panel. I hope the guidance we have published today reinforces our aim for the fee-charging scheme to be fair, simple, transparent and practical. We are committed to keeping our costs under review and therefore the fee level reasonable and proportionate, while maintaining effective regulation.

Thank you to the many organisations who have expressed an interest in joining the Panel. It is part of our commitment to be transparent with stakeholders in relation to the fees charged and the quality of the regulation delivered. And it will enable us to engage with a range of sector stakeholders alongside our existing arrangements.

[Social housing regulation fees – Guidance for registered providers](#) and the [Fees and Resources Advisory Panel – terms of reference](#) are available on the website.

1. The decision statement for the [consultation on fees](#), which ran from November 2016 to January 2017, is available on the website.
2. Funding for some aspects of the regulation function, such as reactive regulation including consumer regulation, will be continued through government grant in aid.

The Homes and Communities Agency is the single, national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England, and is the regulator of social housing providers.

As regulator, its purpose is to promote a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs.

It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation, as enshrined in legislation, focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer.

For more information visit the [HCA website](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#).

Our [media enquiries page](#) has contact details for journalists.

For general queries to the HCA, please email mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk or call 0300 1234 500.