

Avian influenza: Requirement to house poultry in Restricted and Control Areas

Avian influenza (AI) has been detected in Golden Plains Shire. AI is a highly infectious disease affecting many bird species including pet and farmed chickens and can result in significant deaths on poultry farms. New requirements are in effect requiring all poultry within the Restricted and Control Areas to be housed.

WHAT IS AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Avian influenza (AI), commonly referred to as 'bird flu', is a highly contagious viral infection of birds. Serious forms of the disease can cause severe symptoms and sudden death in domestic poultry (up to 100 per cent of birds). Mild strains of the disease cause few or no symptoms in poultry and may go undetected in some species of birds, though can result in some deaths.

All bird owners, particularly those living in the designated Restricted and Control Areas, need to be vigilant for any signs of AI in their flocks. Owners of backyard poultry or free-range poultry should be especially cautious as they are more likely to be exposed to wild birds.

NEW REQUIREMENT TO HOUSE POULTRY

In order to control the spread of avian influenza (AI) within the designated Restricted and Control Areas, Victoria's Chief Veterinary Officer issued a Housing of Livestock clause for 30 days from 7 August 2020, legally requiring all poultry owners – even those with just two or three chickens or birds – to keep their birds housed.

The new legislation states that any owner or person in charge of poultry must ensure:

- all poultry are kept in a building or enclosure separate from wild birds or wild or domesticated animals
- any dead poultry are not left where they may be accessible to wild birds or wild or domesticated animals
- any dead poultry which had experienced, prior to death, clinical signs consistent with AI must immediately be reported to Agriculture Victoria on **1800 675 888**
- feed and water for all poultry must not be accessible to wild birds or wild or domesticated animals
- the entry of wild birds or wild or domesticated animals is prevented into any building or enclosure where poultry are kept
- a disinfectant solution (e.g. soapy water, detergent, bleach or chlorine) appropriate for destroying the AI virus must be made available for use and be used by any person before entering a building or enclosure used for poultry.

WHAT IS A HOUSING OF LIVESTOCK CLAUSE?

A Housing of Livestock clause is a requirement for all poultry owners within the Restricted and Control Areas to house their flock for an initial period of 30 days.

The Housing of Livestock is a temporary requirement designed to minimise the risk of poultry and captive birds from becoming infected with AI.

This is a precautionary measure that applies to both commercial and backyard poultry owners.

This means that you must, where possible, move birds into a suitable building, like a shed or outbuilding adapted to house them, or a new temporary structure. Place netting over openings to stop wild birds getting in and remove any hazardous substances.

Where housing is not practicable, steps should be taken to separate poultry and their food and drink from wild birds that may be carrying AI (e.g. by using netting).

WHY WAS THE HOUSING ORDER ISSUED?

Housing poultry and birds is an effective method of minimising direct contact with wild birds, which can be a vector for AI.

The requirement will reduce the likelihood that more poultry and birds will contract AI – however it will not eliminate the risk of spread.

HOW LONG DO I NEED TO HOUSE MY POULTRY?

The initial housing requirement will remain in place for 30 days. It will be extended until the Chief Veterinary Officer determines it can be safely lifted.

WHAT DO I DO IF I SUSPECT AI?

Bird owners should be vigilant for signs of disease especially where multiple deaths occur in poultry, or many birds are unwell.

Avian influenza is a notifiable disease. Suspicion of infection must be reported to Agriculture Victoria on the Emergency Animal Disease hotline 1800 675 888 or to your local Agriculture Victoria Animal Health and Welfare staff.

HOW IS THE VIRUS SPREAD?

Wild birds are considered the natural host for AI. Certain water birds act as reservoirs of influenza viruses by carrying the virus in their intestines. Infected birds shed the virus in saliva, nasal secretions and faeces. The exposure of wild water birds to domestic birds, particularly poultry, or to their feed or water supply, can lead to the emergence of AI and it is not unusual to have such "spill over events" of AI take place from wild birds into domestic poultry flocks.

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WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms associated with severe forms of the infection include sudden death, respiratory distress, swelling of the head, purple discolouration of the comb and wattles, coughing, sneezing or rasping breathing, rapid drop in feed intake, water intake and egg production, typical sick bird signs such as ruffled feathers, depression, closed eyes, diarrhea and occasionally nervous signs.

Symptoms of the mild form of the disease include respiratory distress, coughing, sneezing or rasping breathing, rapid decrease in feed or water intake and egg production, typical sick bird signs including ruffled feathers, depression, closed eyes and deaths of up to 15 per cent of the flock.

HOW DO I PROTECT MY BIRDS FROM AI?

Implement good biosecurity measures to prevent wild birds from gaining access to the same food and water supplies as your poultry. This may include:

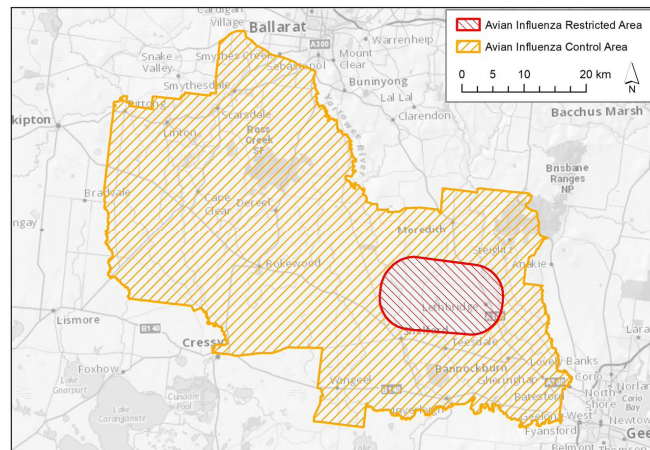
- preventing domesticated poultry from accessing open ponds, lakes, creeks or other watercourses
- purchasing poultry and birds, litter and feed from accredited sources
- quarantining new birds until comfortable they are disease-free
- separating poultry and their food and drink from wild birds (e.g. by using netting)
- storing litter and feed securely to avoid contamination by wild birds
- practicing good hygiene at all times
- not permitting visitors to areas where poultry are kept
- maintaining facilities (e.g. poultry sheds) to ensure safe and hygienic containment.

Water supplied to poultry should not originate from sources where wild birds frequent. The following water sources are less likely to be contaminated:

- treated (chlorinated) mains water
- bore water that has been tested and is suitable quality for poultry; poultry have a low tolerance to saline water.

RESTRICTED AREA AND CONTROL AREA MAPS

Access up-to-date maps of the Restricted Area and Control Area at <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-diseases/poultry-diseases/avian-influenza-bird-flu>.



WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

More information on AI and the Golden Plains situation is available on the Agriculture Victoria website:

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-diseases/poultry-diseases/avian-influenza-bird-flu>.

ACCESSIBILITY

If you would like to receive this information/publication in an accessible format (such as large print or audio) please call the Customer Service Centre on 136 186, TTY 1800 122 969, or email customer.service@ecodev.vic.gov.au.

This document is also available in (PDF and/or Word) format at www.agriculture.vic.gov.au

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