



## Avian Influenza Basics for Pigeon Owners

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### What is Avian Influenza?

Avian influenza (AI) is a disease that can affect many species of birds including pigeons. Waterfowl and shorebirds are natural hosts for the virus that causes avian influenza and will shed the virus into their environment while often showing no signs of illness. Some types of avian influenza are called highly pathogenic (HPAI) because these viruses are rapidly fatal for poultry. In pigeons, the clinical signs of highly pathogenic (HPAI) are often a combination of neurological (twisted necks) and digestive (greenish diarrhea) signs followed by death. The signs of HPAI in pigeons may be very similar to Paramyxovirus.

Since December 2014, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has reported confirmed cases of HPAI, primarily of the H5N2 subtype, in wild waterfowl, backyard and commercial poultry in the Pacific, Central and Mississippi flyways. You can see an up to date listing of confirmed cases at:

[http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=avian\\_influenza.html](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=avian_influenza.html)

### What to do if you suspect your pigeons may have Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza?

Each state has a designated agency to respond to avian influenza cases. In Minnesota, the Board of Animal Health is that agency. **If your flock experiences a sudden, high mortality or has a high percentage of birds with neurologic signs and/or greenish diarrhea, please report this immediately to your veterinarian or the Minnesota Board of Animal Health.** Visit their website at:

<https://www.bah.state.mn.us/poultry,> or call the Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory (MPTL) at [320-231-5170](tel:320-231-5170). The MPTL cooperates with the University of Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL) in St. Paul to conduct and coordinate testing for AI. For more information, contact the VDL at [612-625-8787](tel:612-625-8787) or visit the website (<http://www.vdl.umn.edu/>).

### Biosecurity Recommendations

In order for flock owners to keep their birds healthy by preventing disease, biosecurity is a must! Most past introductions of HPAI to pigeons have come from infected poultry flocks (chickens, ducks, turkeys) but they can also come from infected waterfowl (ducks and geese) and gulls that come to Minnesota. Biosecurity for pigeon lofts must include methods to maintain separation from other types of birds. To achieve the best pigeon loft biosecurity, the best approach is to have a written plan that you follow consistently. Some specific suggestions and approaches are provided in: *Biosecurity for pigeon lofts*.

The USDA provides the following tips on preventing disease in birds which should help in reducing the risk of avian influenza:

- Keep your distance (separating your loft from sources of disease). Some examples are:

- Avoid contact with poultry or birds prior to contact with your own birds.
- Restrict visitors coming to your loft. Restrict access to your birds if your visitors have birds of their own.
- *Look at your own setting, what can you do to prevent your birds from having contact with other birds that could introduce HPAI?*
- Keep it clean (cleaning and disinfecting). Some examples are:
  - Keep feeders and waterers clean and out of reach of wild birds. Clean up feed spills that attract birds, rodents and bugs. Change feeding practices if wild birds continue to be present.
  - Use dedicated or clean clothing and foot wear when entering the loft or working with birds
  - Clean and then disinfect equipment that comes in contact with your birds such as shovels and rakes.
  - Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of housing areas and equipment to limit contact of birds with their waste.
  - *Evaluate your practices. Is it clean or is there room for improvement?*
- Don't haul disease home. Some examples are:
  - Introduction of new birds or returning birds to the flock after exhibition or a race. Keep them separated for at least 14 days
  - Returning dirty crates or other equipment back to the property only after they have been cleaned and disinfected. This includes the tires on the vehicles and trailers.
  - *Take a look and be critical. Is that site where you have set up a quarantine really separated well enough to keep your flock safe? Where do you clean crates? Can the runoff get to your birds?*

**For more detailed information and resources, please visit the following websites:**

Avian Influenza Home Web Page at <http://www.extension.org/pages/24425/avian-influenza-homepage#.VP8nTnQo59C>

USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Biosecurity Tips Web Page at [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal\\_health/2013/fsc\\_biosecurity\\_tips.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/2013/fsc_biosecurity_tips.pdf)

USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Biosecurity and Avian Influenza Web Page at [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal\\_health/2013/fsc\\_biosecurity\\_ai.pdf](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/2013/fsc_biosecurity_ai.pdf)

Minnesota Department of Health Web Page at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/current/h5n2.html>

UMN Extension at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/agriculture/poultry/>