

Guidance for Animal Control Officers Responding to Avian Influenza Mortality Events & Public Inquiries

Overview

As an Animal Control Officer, you may be receiving inquiries from the public about HPAI or assisting with carcass collection and disposal. Please review the detailed guidance below and remember these quick tips:

- Report sick or dead wild birds to MassWildlife at www.mass.gov/reportbirds
- Report domestic poultry and livestock to MDAR at 617-626-1795 or online using [Poultry Disease Reporting Form](#)
- ACOs should use PPE whenever handling sick or dead animals
- Advise the public to avoid handling sick or dead wildlife

What is the Concern?

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is highly transmissible and poses a threat to domestic poultry, wild birds, scavenging mammals, and in rare cases human health. Wild birds play a key role in the epidemiology and spread of HPAI (both locally and over long distances). HPAI can infect all avian species and some mammal species through contact with saliva, mucous, or feces from infected birds. Infections are most commonly seen in waterbirds (geese, swans, ducks, gulls, and shorebirds), raptors, and scavengers.

Clinical Signs in Wildlife

Among wild bird species, the signs and severity of disease can be extremely variable. It is important to note that some species of birds may be infected with HPAI and remain asymptomatic. Clinical signs include: Death; diarrhea; respiratory signs (coughing, sneezing); discharge from the mouth, nose, ears, or vent (clear, cloudy, or greenish); behavioral abnormalities (lethargy, huddled posture); neurological abnormalities (falling over, circling, head tilt or twisting, tremors); and abnormal locomotion that cannot be explained by traumatic injuries (unable to stand, walk, or fly properly).

Carcass Handling and Disposal

Sick birds should be left where they are found. While not all birds will succumb to avian influenza, mortality commonly occurs within 48 hours of infection. Risk of virus transmission is greater from living birds than carcasses. Following mortality, carcasses can be collected and disposed of when necessary. Removing infected carcasses from the environment may assist in decreasing the amount of virus present and will limit exposure to scavenger species.

PPE

Personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn at all times when handling carcasses and disposal containers/bags.

Recommended PPE:

- Disposable gloves, N95 mask, eye protection (goggles or face shield), coveralls (disposable or washable) or a change of outer clothing (long pants, long sleeves), and shoe covers or washable boots.

Additional best practices:

- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling carcasses and until hands have been washed or sanitized.
- Note that birds may be asymptomatic carriers of HPAI and PPE should still be worn even if carcasses appear in good condition or when the only sign of disease is acute mortality.
- HPAI has been detected in multiple wild mammals including foxes, coyotes, skunks, raccoons, and opossums. These species may also be involved in mortality events and appropriate PPE and carcass disposal protocols should be followed.

Disposal & Cleaning

Carcass Disposal

- Double bag carcasses, tie bags tightly.
- Ensure the bag is sealed, then choose an [EPA registered antimicrobial product effective against avian influenza](#), or a spray bottle with 70% ethanol, and spray the outside of the bag with disinfectant solution.
- Dispose of carcasses in local landfill or as your municipality requires.

PPE Disposal

- Non-disposable garments may be removed and placed in a trash bag or re-sealable bag.
- Gloves, boot covers, and other disposable PPE may be combined into a separate re-sealable bag.
- **For disposable items:** Use an [EPA registered antimicrobial product effective against avian influenza](#), 70% ethanol, or 20 mL of household bleach added into the re-sealable bag with the waste. Seal the bag and spray the outside of the bag with additional disinfectant solution. Shake bag to mix the disinfectant and waste. Bring to the local landfill or dispose of waste as your municipality requires.
- **For non-disposable garments:** Ensure the bag is sealed, then choose an [EPA registered antimicrobial product effective against avian influenza](#), or a spray bottle with 70% ethanol, and spray the outside of the bag with disinfectant solution. Wash contaminated garments separately using standard laundry detergent. Empty the contents of the bag into the laundry machine carefully, wearing disposable gloves and only touching the disinfected exterior of the bag. Machine-dry garments at the highest temperature suitable for the

material. Drop disposable gloves into the bag that held the contaminated garments, reseal, and dispose of in trash. Wash hands thoroughly.

- **Cleaning:** Use an [EPA registered antimicrobial product effective against avian influenza](#) to disinfect all non-porous surfaces that may have been contacted during or after disposal.
 - Examples: Any objects touched with dirty gloves, washable boots, goggles and non-disposable face shields, vehicle steering wheels, cellphones, keys.
 - <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/epas-registered-antimicrobial-products-effective-against-avian-influenza>
- Disinfect field equipment between work sites.

Health Monitoring

- If you use PPE appropriately when handling carcasses, your risk of getting sick from avian influenza is low.
- Public health authorities recommend that you monitor your health for signs of influenza infection for **ten days** after your last exposure to potentially HPAI virus-infected birds.
- Contact your healthcare provider if you develop fever, flu-like symptoms, or conjunctivitis (eye inflammation). Inform them that you may have been exposed to avian influenza and explain the PPE you wore.
- If you handled carcasses from a **confirmed** HPAI outbreak and did NOT wear the recommended PPE, please contact the Department of Public Health 24/7 at 617-983-6800 for advice.
- More information regarding humans and avian influenza can be found through [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) and [the CDC](#).

Reporting

Wild birds: Report bird morbidity (severe illness) or mortality events greater than 5 birds and any events involving multiple species or raptors to MassWildlife using the online report form at mass.gov/reportbirds. This allows for tracking and testing to document and respond to potential outbreaks.

Domestic birds: Report sick or dead poultry or other domestic birds using MDAR's online reporting form (<https://www.mass.gov/forms/poultry-disease-reporting-form>) or by calling MDAR's Division of Animal Health at (617) 626-1795. Guidance on keeping domestic birds safe can be found at: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/avian-influenza>

Public Communications

Handling birds: The public should be advised to avoid handling any dead birds or birds showing signs of illness. If a property owner finds dead wildlife on their property, instruct them to use caution and never touch a dead animal with bare hands. If an individual must handle dead birds on their property for disposal, they should be advised to wear gloves, avoid letting the carcasses touch their clothes, double bag and dispose of the carcasses and wash hands thoroughly afterwards.

- **Landfill:** For small- and medium-sized animals, wear gloves or use a shovel to place the carcass into a garbage can lined with two trash bags. Seal the bags and leave in the can for garbage pickup or bring to a landfill. For large-sized animals, contact the town department of public works to see if they're willing to collect and dispose of the carcass.
- **Hiring a Problem Animal Control (PAC) Agent:** If the individual doesn't feel comfortable removing a dead animal from their property, they can consider hiring a licensed PAC agent to remove the carcass. PAC agents are contractors and may charge to provide this service. A professional may be especially helpful in removing dead animals found in the attic, under a house, or inside walls. [Click here to find a list of PAC agents.](#)

Reporting: Direct the public to report the wild bird mortality event at mass.gov/reportbirds or sick/dead poultry to (<https://www.mass.gov/forms/poultry-disease-reporting-form>).

[Mortalities on public property](#)

In areas with ongoing mortalities or visibly ill wildlife, towns can deploy signage to assist in keeping citizens away from areas with suspected HPAI infected wildlife.

Birds displaying signs of illness consistent with HPAI are not candidates for rehabilitation and should be left where they are found. Collecting ill birds and transporting them increases both the risk of spreading the disease to additional locations and the risk of transmission to the human.

Sick birds and infected carcasses can contaminate open bodies of water with HPAI. As not all birds shedding HPAI show signs of illness, pets should be kept leashed and away from water where waterbirds reside. Public water supplies are disinfected with chemicals which are highly effective at inactivating the virus, rendering public drinking water safe.

[Mortalities on private property](#)

In most cities and towns, removing dead animals on private land is the responsibility of the property owner. However, for a larger number of carcasses resulting from a confirmed HPAI outbreak, it may be advisable for a municipality to provide assistance with collection and disposal if possible.