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Be Prepared for Avian Influenza (AI)

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By now, you have probably heard of Avian Influenza (AI) and its devastating effect on the poultry industry in Mid-western states earlier this year. The State of Vermont is making preparations for an outbreak this fall or spring. There is no need to panic, but it is important that all poultry owners — large and small — be knowledgeable about the disease and the necessary precautions to minimize its impact here.

How does the avian influenza virus work?

- Domestic poultry are considered susceptible to a Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) virus which is carried by wild waterfowl. Backyard flocks are just as susceptible, if not more so, than commercial operations.
- The wild birds are not clinically affected, but the virus is deadly in domestic birds that come in contact with contaminated manure, feather dander, dust particles, water, etc.
- To date, over 10% of the nation's egg layer population has been lost to HPAI. Presently, there is no human health risk, although viruses constantly mutate and this is being closely watched.
- Wild waterfowl migrate along "flyways" after commingling in between migrations. Our concern is that birds which brought the virus to the Pacific, Central and Mississippi flyways earlier this year have been commingling with birds that are headed south along the Atlantic flyway and will be returning north in the spring.

What happens if HPAI comes to Vermont?

- All indications are that the virus moves quickly in cool/freezing weather and is highly lethal.
- An Avian Influenza Advisory Committee has been working diligently since May to prepare emergency response protocols and personnel.
- USDA emergency response has not yet contacted the many small, diverse farms common in New England. Quarantine of facilities will affect other ag industries beyond poultry, including milk hauling and feed deliveries.



What preventative steps should I take?

- The number one and most important consideration is the practice of good biosecurity, which is simply a matter of minimizing your birds' chances of exposure to the virus. A number of poultry biosecurity resources are available at <http://www.uvm.edu/extension/agriculture/livestock>.
- Another important consideration is that bird owners have completed voluntary premise registration. This helps the state plan emergency response, and also will significantly increase the chances of securing permitted travel to and from that premise. The Biosecurity audit form for premise registration is available at http://agriculture.vermont.gov/animal_health. Return the form to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture.

Where can I go to find more information, or to report sick or dead birds?

- Updates will be posted to <http://www.uvm.edu/extension/agriculture/livestock> as they become available.
- Report unusual, or unexpected, sickness or death to the Animal Health Section of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets at 802-828-2421.

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