



**Questions & Answers from
“Navigating Avian Influenza: From Prevention to Recovery”
September 2022**

Can Dr. Gauthier differentiate between "backyard producer" and "backyard producer (non-poultry)" as shown on the HPAI data page? Also, what is the cutoff between small/backyard producer and true commercial flock?

To categorize a U.S. flock as “commercial”, we use the flock sizes specified in Federal regulations (9 CFR 53.10) that are required to have an audited biosecurity plan to be fully eligible for indemnity if the flock becomes infected with HPAI.

These flock sizes are considered “commercial” by APHIS:

- $\geq 75,000$ table egg layers
- $\geq 100,000$ broilers raised annually
- $\geq 5,000$ breeder poultry
- $\geq 30,000$ turkeys raised annually
- $\geq 50,000$ gamebirds or waterfowl raised annually for meat or eggs.

All other flocks are exempt from the requirement to have an audited biosecurity plan for indemnity eligibility, and they are labeled “backyard” for the purpose of the HPAI case website.

“Non-poultry” is a designation for flocks that are kept by people that do not sell poultry products from that flock.

Can all types of wild birds spread HPAI? What about songbirds?

Yes, *all* birds can be susceptible to HPAI and spread the virus. Some types of birds, such as dabbling ducks, are better than others at carrying the virus and transmitting it to other birds.

What proportion of poultry outbreaks have been linked to exposure to wild birds compared to between-farm transmission.

At least 85% of cases of HPAI in U.S. poultry flocks in 2022 can be attributed to exposure to virus carried by wild birds.

What are your biosecurity suggestions for when a veterinarian visits a backyard flock, such as: what to use to disinfect the veterinarian's car, boots, etc.?

- Upon arrival to a backyard flock, the veterinarian and flock owner should identify Lines of Separation (LOS). Before crossing a Line of Separation, the veterinarian should collect all equipment and sample containers they anticipate using, and place a hand sprayer with disinfectant and hand sanitizer at the LOS. Then, sanitize hands, and change into clean coveralls, footwear, head covering, and gloves before entering the LOS and contacting birds.
- Inside the LOS, the veterinarian should examine the birds in the order of:
 - youngest birds (brooder/hatcher)
 - Older health birds
 - Birds in quarantine (as potential flock additions)
 - Sick and dead birds last, without returning to other groups of birds after this final stop.
- When exiting across the LOS, the veterinarian should disinfect any equipment or samples using the pre-placed sprayer, remove outer clothing, footwear, head covering, and gloves, and sanitize hands. The items can be put in a bag or container, disinfected, and then placed in the back of the vehicle. Spray the tires of the vehicle with the hand sprayer before getting back in the vehicle. A bottle of hand sanitizer and spray disinfectant can be stored in the driver's door pocket to be used to disinfect hands and shoes before sitting down in the vehicle.
- As soon after leaving the premises as possible, the veterinarian should wash the vehicle, launder or dispose of personal protective equipment, shower, and change clothes.
- Ideally, the veterinarian should not visit another flock for 24 hours or more, if possible.

Can you address ventilation shutdown and foam suffocation?

The most comprehensive resource for guidance on depopulation methods, including ventilation shutdown and foam, is [AVMA Guidelines for the Depopulation of Animals](#). USDA APHIS relies on this resource when making difficult choices in responding to flocks suffering from HPAI and preventing the disease from spreading.

Can you still eat poultry eggs or meat before you cull?

Poultry and eggs that are properly prepared and cooked are safe to eat. Proper handling and cooking of poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165 Fahrenheit provides protection from viruses and bacteria, including avian influenza.

What are your protocols for individuals or facilities that keep non-poultry, non-susceptible species such as psittacine? Psittacine (birds from the parrot family) are very rarely infected with HPAI even under laboratory conditions.

USDA APHIS does not require depopulation of captive wild birds or other bird species that are not domestic poultry due to infection or exposure to HPAI. Your State animal health officials might have different authorities and response plans with regard to HPAI infection in avian species.

I only have 6 chickens in my backyard flock. Would you come out to test such a small flock for influenza if I thought they had contracted it?

Yes, USDA APHIS and State animal health officials will test flocks of any size if flock owners report signs of disease that suggest HPAI infection.

How can I find NPIP certified hatcheries as a backyard chicken owner?

NPIP Participants are listed here: www.poultryimprovement.org/statesContent.cfm

I am hearing from state veterinarians that commercial operations have been able to dispose of birds on-site and that this has helped to contain the spread of HPAI. Is that possible with backyard/small-medium flocks?

Yes, animal health officials prefer to dispose of birds on-site whenever practical for any size flock, to reduce the risk of moving contaminated materials off the affected property.

Does AI pose a risk to other sectors of the industry? (Dairy/Beef/Swine)

No, avian influenza does not pose a risk to dairy, beef, or swine sectors.

What is the average period the virus is contagious outside of a host (such as when an infected bird sneezes on an object or in bedding or feces)?

Avian influenza virus survival outside of a living host depends on the environmental temperature and other factors, such as humidity and exposure to sunlight. In hot weather, avian influenza virus will only survive a few days. In near freezing weather, the virus could survive for more than a month.

What is the risk of this disease reaching Brazil?

Wild birds migrate to Brazil, so the disease could appear there as it has in many countries of the world. Please contact wildlife and animal health officials in Brazil for information about preparing for avian influenza in that region.

How did HPAI first develop? Do you think that there will ever be a cure?

The strain of influenza causing the 2022 outbreak in the United States was first detected in a goose in Guangdong Province, China in 1996. Advancements in vaccine technology and in breeding poultry for resistance to avian influenza appear to be potentially useful steps toward reducing the impact of the disease on poultry production in the future.

Are local climates and their characteristics (heat, humidity, tree cover, elevation, etc.) factors?

Local climates and their characteristics are important factors for wild migratory birds choosing places to congregate.

If one of your birds has a type of respiratory illness or influenza, and is able to recover through antibiotics, are they safe to reintroduce to the flock? Or will they remain carriers for life and be a risk to the remainder of the flock?

You would be taking a risk by reintroducing the recovered bird to the flock. Some poultry diseases cause birds to carry the infection for a long time, sometimes for life, and transmit the infection to other birds. These carriers might not show any signs of illness while they are spreading the infection to flock mates.

Why has there not been more attention given to devise actual humane methods for depopulation? Overheating/hyperthermia is not humane!

Since 2018, USDA APHIS has welcomed proposals and offered grants for research to invent or improve poultry disease response methods, including methods to depopulate HPAI-affected birds. You can find more information about National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program and apply here:

www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/farm-bill/ad-preparedness-response-program

Are shoe dips (pans of water that visitors walk through) helpful?

Foot baths must be kept clean constantly and recharged with fresh disinfectant frequently in order to be effective for disinfecting footwear. Because foot baths aren't practical for most flock keepers to maintain properly, I recommend dedicated footwear (shoes or boots you only wear in your poultry area) instead of foot baths.

Please explain the purpose of the state composting team and why it is part of the HPAI response. Do you mean how the dead birds would be disposed of?

Yes, composting is a practical and ecologically sustainable method of disposing of bird carcasses, manure, and bedding. Natural processes in properly constructed compost piles create heat that quickly kills avian influenza virus and results in a product that is useful as a soil amendment for gardens and plant crops.

For Pineland Farms, how did you plan to depopulate?

It was important for us to feel as comfortable as possible with the situation so we could educate our visitors about HIPATH AI. We were advised that the most humane way to depopulate our flock was to use CO2 gas. The Maine Department of Agriculture and our staff was planning to work in teams to make this process as efficient as possible. We are very thankful that we only had to plan and we were cleared 24hrs later.

Has Pineland Farms instituted a screening process for visitors since the HPAI scare?

We have had a reservation process for our visitors for the past two years. This helps us know who is coming and at what time. Because we had this in place it made it fairly easy for us to control who could potentially come into any area. We had closed our coops to all visitors before the scare and have continued to keep that measure in place.

For Pineland Farms, do you have prescreening procedures before you allow visitors? Would having a "check in" procedure before the visit be of benefit to flock owners?

We have had all visitors check in for the past two years due to the covid 19 pandemic. This has allowed us to know how many people are coming and at what time. We cannot imagine changing this policy at this point and would highly recommend it for any farm that sees a large amount of visitation/foot traffic.