



# Defend the Flock

YOUR BIOSECURITY BULLETIN

Spring 2024

## Q&A with Dr. Melissa Yates



We sat down with poultry epidemiologist and USDA Veterinary Medical Officer Dr. Melissa Yates to get the scoop on biosecurity best practices for backyard bird owners.

### Dr. Yates, can you tell us about your poultry background?

During veterinary school I participated in poultry rotations and externships in Scotland and California, learning about commercial poultry operations and avian health.

After graduating veterinary school, my first job was as the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) coordinator and Assistant State Veterinarian for the state of Arkansas. I also briefly worked for the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) during the 2018 - 2020 virulent Newcastle disease outbreak, where I evaluated biosecurity risks and practices on commercial and backyard poultry premises.

### Why now? Why is biosecurity so important for bird owners?

Although there is always a risk of exposure to infectious disease agents when flocks have outdoor access, right now there is the added risk of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). This deadly disease is spread by wild bird populations, especially waterfowl, and the US is currently experiencing the largest HPAI outbreak in our history.

*continued*



## Diseases to Defend Against

### Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)

These virus strains are extremely infectious, often fatal to domestic poultry, and can spread rapidly from flock to flock.

### Low Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (LPAI)

These virus strains occur naturally in wild migratory waterfowl and shorebirds without causing illness. LPAI can infect domestic poultry, with little or no signs of illness.

### Virulent Newcastle Disease (vND)

This is a contagious and fatal viral disease that affects the respiratory, nervous, and digestive systems of birds and poultry.

### Salmonella

This bacteria can spread from infected poultry to people who eat raw or undercooked poultry meat or eggs.



**Report Sick Birds** If you see signs of illness, take action right away!

Veterinarian \_\_\_\_\_  
Cooperative Extension Office \_\_\_\_\_  
State Veterinarian/Animal or Poultry Diagnostic Lab \_\_\_\_\_  
USDA

**866.536.7593**



continued

## Q&A with Dr. Melissa Yates

### What are some very basic, low-cost measures anyone can take to protect their poultry?

- Do not let your birds come into contact with wild birds – use inexpensive netting or chicken wire to enclose outdoor ranging areas.
- Keep food and water dispensers protected from wild birds and rodents, and regularly wash and sanitize the containers.
- Never use untreated surface pond water as drinking or cleaning water for your birds.
- Wash your hands and/or use hand sanitizer when entering or exiting poultry areas.
- Use dedicated footwear and clothing when working in poultry areas – do not wear this clothing on other areas of the farm or visiting the feed store.

Another simple biosecurity practice is to prevent visitors, especially those who own poultry, from entering your poultry areas. Birds that appear healthy can still carry poultry diseases, and oblivious visitors can carry pathogens on their clothing or footwear that ultimately infect your flock.

### MORE SCOOP FOR YOUR COOP

On **March 14**, Dr. Yates will present an exclusive webinar, "Biosecurity on a Budget: Pro Tips to Protect Your Poultry." Tune in at 2 p.m. EDT to learn about low-cost, accessible biosecurity solutions you can implement quickly and easily to defend your flock.



**LEARN MORE & REGISTER FOR THE WEBINAR >>>**



Roughly **10.6 million** U.S. households own backyard chickens

Source: 2021-2022 American Pet Products Association National Pet Owners Survey

### Beyond the basics, what additional biosecurity measures should people consider?

Poultry owners can level up their defenses by writing a biosecurity plan that establishes simple protocols for anyone visiting or caring for their birds. It's very easy if you download one of our free [biosecurity plan templates](#). Beyond that:

- Install fencing and build fully enclosed poultry hutches and outdoor areas with fenced or netted roofs and walls to help prevent wild birds from making contact with your flock.
- Institute a pest control program using bait stations or traps to help prevent rodents from introducing diseases.
- Install a gate and / or biosecurity signs at your property's entrance to discourage unintended visitors.

### Do you have any other advice for folks hoping to keep their birds safe?

I advise that backyard bird owners purchase new poultry stock as day-old chicks or hatching eggs from NPIP-approved hatcheries and breeders – they comply with federal regulations regarding participation in poultry disease programs. Additionally, many poultry diseases are transmitted from bird to bird, so purchasing new poultry as day-old chicks or hatching eggs lessens the risk that they have already been exposed to or infected by a disease.

For more information about how to keep your flocks healthy, follow **Defend the Flock** on **Facebook** and **Twitter** and visit [www.aphis.usda.gov/animalhealth/defendtheflock](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animalhealth/defendtheflock).

