



Migrating birds bring risks — stay alert!

As migratory birds return this fall, they pose a significant threat of transmitting bird flu to commercial and backyard domestic flocks, including chickens, ducks, turkeys, and geese. This highly contagious virus has affected 1,182 flocks across 48 states since 2022.

Recently, it has been detected in Franklin County (Oct. 15), Kitsap County (Oct. 17), and a presumptive positive case was reported in Lewis County on Oct. 23, in Washington state.

With wild birds—especially waterfowl—acting as silent carriers of the virus, it is crucial for local producers and bird owners to take immediate precautions to protect their flocks.

Swift action is necessary to mitigate the spread of disease and safeguard our agricultural communities.

Fortunately, **no infected birds or eggs have entered the food supply, and the public risk remains low.** Additionally, there are no confirmed or suspected cases on dairy farms in Washington State.

Dr. Amber Itle, State Veterinarian, Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), explains that every summer, waterfowl migrate north to Alaska. While there, they mingle with other waterfowl from Asia and Europe, exchanging viruses before heading south in their respective flyways.

“What's really concerning is that avian influenza is a very fatal disease of chickens and poultry,” she said. **“Every backyard flock is at risk right now.** We want to remind everyone that it’s important to be aware that we typically see a high number of sick or dead birds (with avian flu).”

Dr. Itle further explained that one day the birds may appear perfectly fine or a bit lethargic, and then the next day, there could be a sudden 40% mortality rate. Both backyard and commercial flocks are at risk.

Backyard flock owners and poultry producers: what to know

Recent cases underscore the importance of vigilant monitoring and enhanced biosecurity for backyard flock owners and poultry producers. Keep an eye out for any signs of illness in your birds, such as coughing, sneezing, lethargy, or unexpected mortality.

To protect your flock, avoid contact with wild birds, especially waterfowl, and steer clear of areas where they gather, like lakes, ponds, or irrigation canals. Regularly clean and disinfect coops, equipment, and shoes. Limit visitors to your flock and refrain from sharing equipment with other poultry owners.

If you notice any unusual illness or death in your domestic flock, please call 1-800-606-3056. For wild birds, report your findings [here](#).

Risks to humans

Human cases of bird flu are rare and usually occur in people having direct contact with infected birds. Recently, a few individuals working at a facility with infected birds developed mild symptoms, which is not unexpected given the high virus levels. There has been no evidence of human-to-human transmission, and the risk to the general public remains low.

Avoid touching sick or dead birds! If you must handle or be exposed to birds suspected of having bird flu, be sure to wear protective gear such as gloves, goggles, hair coverings, N95 masks, coveralls, and rubber boots or booties to protect yourself.

Follow these recommendations

For many farmers, their birds are cherished pets which may also include some of their livestock. To help ensure poultry remain healthy and avoid getting bird flu, please follow these basic steps:

- Keep birds in enclosed spaces or covered runs to prevent contact with wild birds.
- Use gloves and dedicated clothing and boots for handling your flock.

- Change clothes and wash hands thoroughly after handling your birds, and regularly disinfect surfaces and equipment.
- Limit visitors to your flock, especially other poultry owners.
- Monitor for signs of illness and report any unusual activity, such as sudden death in multiple birds.