

Protecting people from Avian Influenza: Information for poultry operators and workers

November 24, 2023

Avian Influenza (avian flu) is spreading quickly in BC and affecting poultry farms. To help reduce the spread of avian flu, and to keep BC's poultry healthy, we need you to stay healthy.

Key Messages

- Do all that you can to prevent exposure to the virus. Wear appropriate PPE, minimize entry to poultry areas, especially if known to be positive, and properly handle your birds, mortality and waste. Get a flu shot to provide some protection against similar viruses.
- Public Health is responsible for following-up with all farmers who have been knowingly exposed to the virus, or other zoonotic diseases. Be prepared to share any exposures among your family or farm workers so they can be identified if they get sick.
- Talk to Public Health or your doctor if you have contact with poultry and begin to feel sick. Early reporting will help to prevent spread of illness and ensures you and your workers get on preventive treatment early if needed.

What is happening?

Avian flu is a sickness caused by the avian influenza virus.

- It mostly affects birds but can also affect other animals and people.

If you get exposed to a sick bird, you can get sick, too. Viruses like avian flu can change, and may gain the ability to spread more easily between people if given the chance. Monitoring for human infection and person-to-person spread is important to keep poultry operators, workers, and their families safe.

Avian flu can be a serious disease in humans. Early detection and intervention are crucial to control its spread among people and avoid more serious effects on health.

What to do about avian flu?

Speak with your local Public Health team. When a premise is infected with avian flu, your local Public Health team will reach out to find out who may have been exposed to determine if testing or treatment is needed. Public Health will provide a designated contact person for you to check in with during the monitoring period and may touch base with you throughout. The health professionals on this team are doing this to support you and your family and staff, and ensure that any illness can be contained as quickly as possible, thereby preventing the spread of disease to others, particularly vulnerable people.

Why is Public Health asking these questions? The information being collected helps keep track of who may have been exposed to avian flu so that they can quickly detect if someone is sick because they were in contact with infected birds. Public Health can then act quickly to reduce possible spread to others. It is important to

indicate all the people who have come in contact with sick birds, so that they can provide appropriate testing and treatment recommendations if needed. This helps keep you and the people around your birds safe.

What will Public Health ask? We will ask for details about the following:

- Who on the premises may have been exposed to sick birds. You can prepare for this by keeping a log of who visits your farm and when they were there.
- The personal protective measures that were used by you and other workers. Be sure to have your biosecurity and farm entry SOPs easily available.
- Whether anyone has been vaccinated this year with a flu shot. Ask your family and farm staff to share when they were recently vaccinated and by whom to provide to Public Health if required.
- Flu-like symptoms that you, your family, or workers may be experiencing. Be sure to check in with your family and your workers often and share any changes in health when they appear. This protects you and your family.

Public Health may also provide guidance for people who have been in contact with sick birds, such as:

- Testing for avian flu
- Medication (Tamiflu®) to prevent or treat avian flu
- Monitoring of symptoms (fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, conjunctivitis, or pink eyes) for 10 days
- What to do if symptoms appear:
 - Contact a health care provider right away to tell them you were exposed to avian flu.
 - Stay home and away from other people until you feel better.
 - If you have to be near other people, wear a mask and wash your hands often.

What else can I do to protect against avian flu?

- Limit the number of people who touch or come close to birds, especially following a positive detection of avian flu in your flock.
- Be careful around birds, bird waste, and their environment, even if testing results are not yet available.
- Wear gloves, protective clothing, shoes, goggles, and masks when you are near or working with birds.
- If you have to touch sick birds or their eggs or feces, follow the safety rules from [WorkSafe BC](#) or [AgSafe BC](#).
- After you touch sick birds or their waste, take off your PPE, and wash your hands for 30 seconds.

Get a flu shot. The flu shot may not protect you from avian flu, but it can help you avoid getting sick from the avian flu virus and the human flu virus at the same time. It can also lower the chance of avian flu changing to something much more contagious. If you haven't already, register with the *Get Vaccinated* system to get your vaccine at getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca.