

Avian influenza — Protect against infection and prevent the virus from spreading

According to the BC Centre for Disease Control, avian influenza (flu) has been transmitted in rare cases from birds to humans and from humans to humans. Because of this possible health risk, it is important to protect humans against exposure to avian flu.

What is avian influenza?

Avian flu is a viral disease that affects poultry and, in some cases, humans. There are several strains of avian flu, which are closely related to human influenza.

What if an outbreak occurs on my farm?

If you suspect a bird in your flock is infected with avian flu, you must take immediate action.

Every farm in British Columbia should follow the [National Avian On-Farm Biosecurity Standard](#). This document describes biosecurity protocols, including how to develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) for self-quarantine.

Make sure everyone follows your enhanced biosecurity protocols for entering and leaving contaminated areas. The National Avian On-Farm Biosecurity Standard and the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) (CFIA) can help you define the necessary enhancements.

An outbreak will also require the use of safe work procedures and personal protective equipment (PPE), including respiratory protection for workers.

It is very important that no birds or materials be taken from suspected infection areas. All materials, equipment, and people coming out of such areas must be decontaminated. Do not enter contaminated areas, if possible. If you must enter, follow the direction of CFIA.

How can I protect myself and others during an outbreak?

Implement your SOP for self-quarantine, use enhanced PPE, and follow instructions from CFIA and your regional health authority. Review these items with your workers and make sure they have any necessary training.

Restrict access

Limit and restrict access to contaminated areas, flocks, and materials, as specified in the National Avian On-Farm Biosecurity Standard. Access should be limited to essential services only and as directed by your veterinarian and CFIA.

Wash hands

Handwashing and standard biosecurity protocols are very important. Anyone who has been in close contact with infected animals or contaminated surfaces must wash their hands immediately. Also wash hands after removing gloves and other PPE. Hands must be washed thoroughly with soap and water for 15–20 seconds.

Use personal protective equipment

PPE minimizes the risk of infection. Anyone entering an area where there is a risk of exposure must wear PPE. This includes activities related to the destruction and disposal of flocks, as well as cleaning and disinfecting buildings, structures, and equipment.

Use the following PPE:

- Rubber boots or protective foot covers that are disinfected or disposed of
- Disposable coveralls, along with head covering, worn over cotton coveralls and taped to boot covers
- Disposable nitrile gloves taped at the wrists to disposable coveralls
- Chemical safety goggles (not just safety glasses)
- Respirators

PPE requirements

In addition to the personal protective equipment listed above, a respirator is required when entering the “hot zone” of a suspected infected farm. The minimum recommendation is a disposable particulate respirator (for example, an N95) used as part of a comprehensive respiratory protection

program. Based on the hazards associated with wet cleaning and disinfecting chemicals, you will likely need to use a NIOSH-approved full facepiece respirator with combination P100/organic vapour cartridges for particulates and organic vapours (as a minimum).

Workers must be clean-shaven and fit tested for the model and size of respirator. Workers must also be trained to do a seal check to make sure the facepiece seals with the face.

Other PPE requirements include the following:

- Discard disposable PPE properly in sealed plastic bags.
- Clean and disinfect reusable or non-disposable PPE.
- Wash hands after removing PPE.
- Ensure that workers are trained in proper techniques for putting on, removing, and disposing of PPE.

Contact WorkSafeBC

If you have an outbreak of avian flu on your farm, you are required to notify WorkSafeBC — call 1.888.621.7233. A WorkSafeBC prevention officer will phone you to confirm the required safe work procedures that must be followed by you and your workers, including contractors.

Other resources

Visit [worksafebc.com/avian-flu](https://www.worksafebc.com/avian-flu) for more information and resources.

