

## **Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Update**

- ***What birds are being affected by HPAI?***

The birds most likely to be found with HPAI include waterfowl (e.g., ducks, swans, geese, coots), shore birds (e.g., gulls, cormorants, and pelicans), and raptors (e.g., vultures, hawks, owls). Songbirds make up a small percentage of HPAI detections, but certain species (sparrows, doves, blackbirds, starlings, and corvids) have been found to be affected.

- ***Why are we seeing new cases of HPAI now?***

Migratory birds pass through North Carolina in the spring and fall as they travel between their breeding and wintering areas. During these times, traveling birds often congregate in large groups, allowing for the rapid spread of disease. Notably, waterfowl can carry HPAI without becoming symptomatic, while still spreading the virus to healthy birds and other animals. Additionally, influenza viruses are typically cold hardy, and are therefore able to proliferate more easily during the cold winter months. For these reasons, we tend to see HPAI cases increase during the fall and winter months, with a lesser increase in cases during the spring migration and a decline in cases as temperatures warm in the late spring.

- ***What is the NC Wildlife Resources Commission doing about HPAI?***

The NCWRC is currently tracking HPAI cases in wildlife across the state, but we are not able to collect and test every single dead bird across the state. If you find dead wild animals, especially 5 or more dead birds in one area within a week, you can report it by contacting the N.C. Wildlife Helpline at 1-866-318-2401 (Monday-Friday, 8 am – 5 pm) or anytime via email at [HWI@ncwildlife.org](mailto:HWI@ncwildlife.org). Unfortunately, the NCWRC is not able to track HPAI in domestic ducks or geese, if domestic waterfowl are found sick or dead these should be reported to the NC Department of Agriculture at 919-707-3250.

- ***How do I safely dispose of dead wildlife?***

Avoid direct contact with the animal. Use disposable gloves, a plastic bag, or other protective layer over your hands, or use a shovel to pick up the animal and place it into a garbage bag. Tie this bag and place it into a second garbage bag. Tie off the second bag and put it in the trash. You can also wear a face mask and eye protection if additional protection seems warranted. Always wash your hands with soap and water after disposing of any animal carcass.

- ***What can the public do about HPAI?***

You can help by reporting sick/dead wildlife to the NC Wildlife Helpline (Monday-Friday, 8 am – 5 pm) or anytime via the NC Wildlife Helpline email address. People can reduce human-caused spread of HPAI by removing food sources that encourage birds to congregate and feed in one location. Cease any feeding of wild ducks and geese. Consider removing bird feeders, especially near domestic poultry, or at least regularly sanitizing feeders and bird baths.

- ***Recommendations for game bird hunters***

Hunters are advised not to harvest or handle game birds that are obviously sick. Hunters should wear gloves when handling and dressing any harvested birds, and inedible parts should be buried where they were harvested or disposed of in the trash. Wash hands and tools with soap and water or disinfectant wipes, and cook all game meat thoroughly prior to consumption.

- ***Recommendations for wildlife rehabilitators or people with backyard poultry flocks***

It is important to prevent exposure of your animals to free-ranging wild birds and their feces. Maintain animals in enclosures that prevent access by wild birds by using bird-proof fencing.

While songbirds don't appear to be at significant risk from the current HPAI outbreak, other contagious diseases such as avian conjunctivitis and salmonellosis can still spread where these birds congregate. Bird feeders and baths should be thoroughly cleaned with bleach on a regular basis and should not be placed where they would encourage wild birds to co-mingle with backyard poultry or rehabilitation animals.

Avoid unprotected, direct or close physical contact with sick or dead animals (esp. birds), feces, milk, or litter from sick animals that may potentially be infected with HPAI. When contact is necessary, use personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, a mask, and eye protection. Thoroughly wash hands and disinfect any clothes and gear before working with other animals.

When transporting an animal suspected of having HPAI, place the animal in an appropriately-sized carrier and, if possible, secure the carrier in an area with open ventilation, such as the bed of a truck or the back seat of a car with the windows open. If you frequently interact with birds, consider having a dedicated set of clothing and shoes for use only in the areas where the birds are kept.

- ***Recommendations for bird watchers***

Bird watchers are not at high risk of HPAI exposure, but to help prevent potential exposure they can avoid contact with sick or dead birds, wash hands with soap, and clean shoes, field clothes, and bird watching gear with appropriate disinfectants after a bird watching excursion.