



## State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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Dear Backyard Flock Poultry Owner:

On February 21, 2025, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) reported its first case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in domestic poultry since 2023. Since then, there have been five additional detections of the disease in domestic poultry throughout the state. Of these six cases, four were in live bird markets in Union, Hudson, and Mercer Counties. The remaining two cases were in backyard flocks, one in Salem County and one in Atlantic County. The HPAI virus has been found in wild birds within New Jersey, particularly since the end of December 2024. According to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), suspect and confirmed avian influenza infections have caused localized deaths of multiple wild birds this winter, with reports of sick and dying wild birds continuing into the present.

HPAI is highly contagious and often fatal in domestic poultry species. Signs of HPAI in poultry can include:

- Sudden death
- Decrease in feed or water consumption
- Respiratory signs such as coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge
- Swelling around the eyes
- Open-mouth breathing
- Darkening of the comb/wattles
- Reddening of the shanks or feet
- Decreased egg production
- Lethargy

As HPAI continues to spread across the United States, poultry owners are urged to review their biosecurity practices and remain on alert for clinical signs of HPAI in their flock. Multi-species operations, particularly those with both poultry and ruminants on-site, are encouraged to mitigate areas in which the spread of disease between species may be at risk.

Online resources, such as [Secure Milk Supply- Biosecurity](https://securemilksupply.org/milk-producers/biosecurity/) - <https://securemilksupply.org/milk-producers/biosecurity/>, [CFSPH - Biosecurity](https://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/biosecurity/) - <https://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/biosecurity/> and [USDA Defend the Flock](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/defend-the-flock) - <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/defend-the-flock> can be utilized to tailor a farm-specific biosecurity plan. It is recommended that producers focus on-farm biosecurity practices to prevent wild bird contact with their poultry and livestock. USDA Wildlife Services (908-735-5654) can assist with wild bird mitigation plans on agricultural premises.

HPAI spreads through contact with bodily secretions, including feces, ocular, nasal, or oral secretions from infected birds. The virus can spread on vehicles, equipment, shoes, etc. Biosecurity is particularly important for those residents of New Jersey who keep backyard poultry flocks, which are typically smaller flocks and can include mixed bird types. Backyard flocks often have constant or frequent access to the outdoor environment by nature of

their housing style, which increases the likelihood of direct encounters with wild birds or their feces. Wild birds can enter backyard flock enclosures, increasing risk of direct contact. Potential exposure to wild birds via sharing waterers, feeders, or swimming areas is another source of disease risk to domestic poultry. Practicing good biosecurity can help prevent the spread of HPAI onto a farm.

Those biosecurity practices include:

- Eliminating exposure of domestic birds to wild birds. Minimizing standing water and extra feed in the environment that might attract wild birds.
- Avoiding contact with other poultry.
- Keeping a specific set of shoes and clothing for tending to poultry. Disposable boot covers or a foot bath that is changed regularly are other measures that can be used.
- Minimizing the number of people who visit the birds.
- Avoiding sharing equipment with other flocks and using appropriate disinfectants for equipment that must come onto a farm.

According to the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), it is advised that individuals use personal protective equipment (PPE) when in contact with sick or dead birds. PPE is available at each county's Rutgers Cooperative Extension Office. The county office contact information can be found at <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/county/>. The NJDA continues to work closely with the NJDOH, NJDEP, and other state and federal partners to monitor the current H5N1 situation and coordinate disease control and elimination measures.

HPAI is a reportable disease. If you suspect HPAI in your poultry, please alert the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Health at 609-671-6400.

Sincerely,



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