

AVIAN INFLUENZA

BIOSECURITY IS KEY

Good biosecurity is vital to maintain overall flock health & provide an essential defence to help limit the spread of disease. Clean footwear before & after visiting your birds. Put a footbath either outside or just inside your run & ensure you dip your feet before entering & leaving.

Keep areas clean, tidy & regularly disinfect hard surfaces, feeders & drinkers. You should use a disinfectant which has been approved by DEFRA & tested to kill off the AI virus such as Nettex Virocur, Progiene Coxicur or Virkon LSP.

Discourage wild birds from your chicken run. Restrict access to food sources by placing your birds' food & water in fully enclosed areas & clear up any spilled feed regularly. You can also keep your birds separate from wild birds & wild waterfowl by putting suitable fencing around any outdoor areas they can access.

Fence off areas of standing water & put netting over ponds & run enclosures. If you keep waterfowl as well as chickens, then they should be housed separately as waterfowl are the main virus carriers. Rodents are a common pest issue, but they can also be vectors in spreading AI, therefore it is important to consider rodent control as part of your biosecurity measures.

DISINFECT, PROTECT, INSPECT

The UK's chief veterinary officer Dr Christine Middlemiss said there was a "phenomenal level" of avian flu in the UK as poultry & waterfowl face "flockdown" for the second year running.

This winter's concern is Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1, which stresses the importance for keepers to be **highly vigilant** & follow the most up-to-date guidelines.

REMAIN VIGILANT

It is important to be aware of the clinical signs of AI & remain vigilant for any signs of disease in your flock. All chicken owners should always have a first aid kit handy to help deal with minor problems. Examining your chickens regularly can help you to know what is normal & to identify any problems early.

Typical clinical signs of AI include:

- Swollen head
- Closed eyes
- Difficulty breathing
- Lethargy
- Discolouration of the face
- Sudden death.

Ducks & geese may show less or different symptoms so if you are in any doubt or have any concerns about the health of your birds, then you should seek prompt advice from your vet.

If you suspect that your birds might have AI, report it immediately by calling: DEFRA Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301.

To keep up to date with the latest news, it is also well worth registering your flock to receive free alerts on any outbreaks of bird flu in your area. Visit [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) & search 'poultry registration form'.

HAPPY HEN HOMES

Your flock are likely to be spending more time in their housing & run, therefore it is important to ensure that you provide enough living space for your flock. There are no specific regulations for backyard owners regarding stocking density, however, as a guide we would recommend that you have at least 4ft square of space per bird.

You should also have one feeder & one drinker for every four birds or less. Make sure that the coop & run are in good repair & check that the housing has adequate ventilation. Ensure the run is well attached & has a waterproof covering to protect the flock from contaminated wild bird droppings & bad weather.

We also recommend adding some enrichment to limit boredom whilst housed. Dust baths, perches & flowerpots to jump on can be good ways of enriching the environment. Alternatively, keep your hens occupied with a supplementary treat to help encourage scratch feeding. Consider a bedding for its insulation benefits, natural antibacterial & antifungal properties & to increase enrichment; keeping birds happy, active & interested.

TIP TOP TIPS

DISINFECT

- Clean regularly with a DEFRA approved disinfectant - clean footwear before & after visiting your birds, regularly disinfect hard surfaces, feeders, drinkers & keep areas clean & tidy

PROTECT

- Restrict access to your birds & discourage wild birds from your chicken run
- Consider your rodent control programme
- Ensure that your housing & run are in good repair & provide enough living space for your birds
- Provide enrichment to limit boredom whilst housed

INSPECT

- Be aware of the risk & clinical signs of AI
- Health check your birds regularly & remain vigilant for any signs of disease
- Register your flock to keep up to date with the latest news