

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

HPAI: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

I make a very conscious effort to not recycle articles or repeat topics too often in this space. That said, Avian Influenza has been confirmed in Jackson and Nemaha counties within Meadowlark District, so it seems like a good time to send this information out. The impact of this viral disease on domesticated poultry has impacted large production systems and backyard birders alike. This is a very serious issue for poultry producers to be aware of, with steps that can be taken to protect your flock.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is a rapidly spreading viral disease that can infect many types of birds but is especially deadly to domestic poultry. Avian influenza is a relatively common virus that is referred to as avian flu or bird flu, but the highly pathogenic strain is the most serious and deadly version of the virus. Poultry with HPAI do NOT survive the illness, which is a big reason why HPAI receives so much attention in the news.

Migrating wild birds are the primary spreading agent of HPAI as they travel in spring, fall and winter seasons. Signs of avian influenza include the following symptoms: coughing, sneezing, difficulty breathing, depression, lack of energy, decreased feed/water intake, decreased egg production, sudden unexplained death and swelling or purple discoloration of head, eyelids, comb wattle and legs. An effective vaccine is not readily available, so biosecurity is the best option for prevention of HPAI. Good biosecurity protection methods come from a three-pronged approach.

The first level of protection is on your property where the birds are kept. Avoid attracting wild birds, particularly waterfowl, to your operation. Keep feed covered, contained, feeding inside the coop if possible, and clean up any spilled feed. Reduce any puddles or standing water in and around the coop. Do not visit, especially with pets, or allow birds access to ponds, streams or other waterbodies where migratory birds have access. Don't utilize untreated water from these sources either. If the outside run or feeding area is not covered, consider covering and enclosing those areas with netting.

The second point of discussion revolves around the birds themselves. Do not move birds from farm to farm and be particularly careful to clean hands, clothes and footwear if you move between multiple locations where poultry are kept. Limit or halt travel to sales, shows and swaps. This is especially true in areas that have confirmed cases of HPAI or during times of the year when migratory birds are more active in the area. Isolate new birds or those who've come from events of comingling.

Finally, limit visitors and don't let others handle your birds. If you do have need for visitors, discuss where they have been recently. Have visitors wash hands and wear clean clothes as well as footwear. If you have frequent visitors, you might even consider providing clean coveralls and boots that are properly cleaned and disinfected.

What should you do if you suspect your flock exhibiting signs of influenza or suspected exposure? Your local veterinarian is a good starting point, but the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health is another good resource that can be reached at 785-564-6601 or toll free at 833-765-2006. There is a wealth of information related to highly pathogenic avian influenza on their website as well,

<https://www.agriculture.ks.gov/divisions-programs/division-of-animal-health/animal-diseases/avian-influenza>