

Avian Flu and You

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We've made it to mid-winter, amid another year of a pandemic. The last thing we want to worry about is another disease spreading. However, this time of year is prime waterfowl and game bird (crow, grouse, pheasant, and quail) season, and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has already been confirmed in hunter harvested wild ducks in North Carolina. The NC Zoo was forced to shut its aviary to visitors this month after the highly contagious strain was found in 40 birds shot by hunters in North Carolina. Wildlife on the move, specifically waterfowl that migrate into and through North Carolina on the eastern North American Migration Flyways from their summer grounds in northern Canada, could have spread HPAI to birds here. While some types of avian influenza cause only mild illness in birds, the virus can mutate into a more dangerous version that could be potentially fatal to your flock and our wild birds.

According to the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (NCDACS), avian influenza is caused by an influenza type A virus which can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and is carried by wild waterfowl such as ducks, geese, and shorebirds. Avian Influenza (AI) can be spread in various ways including through air contaminated with the virus from coughing and sneezing and feces. The virus can be carried and transmitted to other poultry through our clothing, boots, and equipment. Due to the ease of transmission and spread, it is important to follow all biosecurity protocols while working with your flock no matter the size. [Backyard Poultry Cleaning Checklist](#)

You might wonder, why should we worry about this? Durham doesn't have any big poultry operations. True, but nationally NC is 2nd in Turkey production and the 3rd largest poultry producing state in the US, so a major outbreak could be devastating to our state's economy. Also, HPAI doesn't discriminate what type of bird or where it strikes, and Durham has a lot of backyard poultry that is as equally susceptible to it. The avian flu will affect them just as quickly as the big chicken and turkey farms with thousands of birds. Which is why I'm bringing this matter to your attention. If we protect our flock early in the outbreak, we can hopefully prevent the mandatory restrictions that occurred during the 2015 outbreak.

How do you know if your birds are sick? Watch out for:

- Reduced energy, decreased appetite, and/or decreased activity
- Lower egg production and/or soft-shelled or misshapen eggs (I know it's the winter and production is lower, but you know what is regular for your hens)
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, and wattles
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, comb, and legs
- Difficulty breathing, runny nares (nose), and/or sneezing
- Twisting of the head and neck, stumbling, falling, tremors, and/or circling

- Greenish diarrhea

If you notice any of these warning signs **REPORT IT!** Reporting is the most important part of protecting the rest of our flocks and keeping HPAI from spreading.

- Local Veterinarian
- NC State Veterinary Office 919-707-3250
- NC Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory system – Raleigh 919-733-3986
- USDA 866-536-7593

While HPAI is highly deadly to birds, it can be prevented by implementing some at-home biosecurity measures. More information about HPAI can be found at www.ncagr.gov. With some luck and good preventative measures, we can hopefully avoid any major outbreaks this winter.

The Durham Soil and Water Conservation District is part of Durham County Government. Their mission is to conserve, enhance and promote the natural resources of Durham County by providing technical assistance, environmental education information and economic incentives to County citizens and by exhibiting a diversified program to meet its changing needs. For more information, visit <http://dconc.gov/swcd> or “like” on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/DCoSWCD> or “follow” on Twitter at <http://www.Twitter.com/DCoSWCD>.