

Recommended Practices to Minimize Avian Influenza Transmission at Virginia Poultry Shows and Exhibitions

Standard biosecurity practices are important for Virginia's poultry community and there is currently a heightened level of risk because of the ongoing highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak across the country. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services State Veterinarian, Dr. Richard Wilkes, recommends that poultry owners and event organizers increase their current level of disease prevention practices.

Because of the potential for spillover from wildlife, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has become of significant importance for small poultry producers who often take their birds to fairs, shows, and exhibitions which could increase the potential for the disease to spread.

Steps to Take BEFORE the Exhibition

Bird Measures

For Exhibition Organizers:

- Arrange event to minimize contact between exhibition birds and wild birds or wild waterfowl
 - Arrange to house exhibition poultry indoors or at minimum within a screened area
 - Remove food and water sources that attract wild birds
- Limit the time birds are congregated and co-mingled at an exhibition. Different species (chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese) should be separated in the exhibition. Measures might include minimizing the total time birds are on the exhibition grounds. Ideally exhibition birds should be on the exhibition grounds for no more than 72 hours.
- Minimize interaction between birds from separate flocks.
- Establish a relationship with a veterinarian who will be present or on call for the duration of the exhibition. The veterinarian will be responsible for monitoring the animals for clinical signs, evaluating sick animals and taking additional steps as warranted to minimize the risk of illness in the birds.
- Establish a protocol to immediately remove sick birds from the exhibition area and isolate them away from other birds. This protocol should include a designated isolation pen/area where there is no contact with any other birds, and contact with humans is minimal. Establish a system to maintain records of individual bird identification, such as leg bands, and source farms or owner information to enhance the speed and accuracy of an animal disease investigation associated with the exhibition.
- Minimize contact between exhibition birds prior to event (limit meetings where poultry from separate premises are present).

- Consider hosting a meeting with exhibitors and their family members prior to the start of the exhibition to do the following:
 - Provide contact information for the designated exhibition veterinarian
 - Provide instructions on how to report bird illnesses and explain any specific actions that may be required if a bird becomes sick at the show
 - Review exhibition regulations
 - Review and encourage disease control measures to be utilized during the exhibition, including the daily monitoring of the birds during the show, as well as for when the exhibitor returns home
 - Provide public health information related to highly pathogenic avian influenza
- Consider consequences, and have a plan for how you will proceed, if there are birds that express signs of illness while at your event.
- Discuss biosecurity practices. Minimize contact between flocks, including movement of people from flock to flock.

For Exhibitors:

- Consult a veterinarian or call the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at 540-209-9120 to understand and implement applicable biosecurity and bird health practices at home.
- Minimize contact with wild birds and waterfowl
 - House poultry indoors or at minimum within a screened area
 - Remove food and water sources that attract wild birds
- Minimize the number of people who have contact with your birds; particularly limit contact between your flock and other people who own birds.
- Avoid personal contact with birds other than your own
- Avoid personal contact with wildlife, especially wild birds and waterfowl
- Keep tools and equipment clean
 - Clean cages and food and water containers daily
- Wash hands with soap and water and wear clean boots before and after working with your birds
 - Wash and disinfect boots after working with birds
 - Consider having dedicated boots and clothing for working with your birds
- Become familiar with the clinical signs of highly pathogenic avian influenza in birds:
 - Sudden death
 - Wheezing, coughing, nasal discharge
 - Decreased energy
 - Decreased feed intake
 - Drop in egg production or egg quality
 - Swelling and/or discoloration of eyes, head, neck
 - Tremors, circling, drooping wings, twisting of head and neck
- Seek veterinary assistance if a bird becomes sick

- Isolate sick birds immediately by moving them away from other birds and placing in a separate pen
 - Tend to sick birds after tending to healthy birds
- If any birds exhibit illness at home on the farm within 14 days prior to traveling to the show, no birds (healthy or sick) from your flock should be taken to any shows or exhibitions.
- Personally refrain from attending bird shows and exhibitions (even without birds) if there are sick birds on your farm
- Understand the risks of taking a bird to an exhibition
- Ask the exhibition organizer about any specific actions that may be required if a bird becomes sick at the show
- Refrain from attending another event with your birds for at least two weeks after returning from an exhibition to reduce the risk of spreading influenza

Human Measures

For Exhibition Organizers

- Establish methods to rapidly communicate (i.e. email addresses and/or phone numbers from show entry information, social media channels, etc.) with exhibitors about procedural changes or incidents associated with the exhibition
- Host non-animal-related activities (i.e. dances, pizza parties, etc.) in locations other than animal barns

Steps to Take DURING the Exhibition

Bird Measures

For Exhibition Organizers

- Ensure that all birds are adequately identified and that identification, along with name and on-site contact information for owner(s), is recorded upon arrival at the show or exhibition
- Require exhibitors travelling to Virginia from other states to provide a certificate of veterinary inspection issued by an accredited veterinarian within 30 days for all birds attending the show or exhibition, have a negative Pullorum test within 30 days and a negative AI test within 14 days of the show.
- Consider requiring exhibitors to provide a “poultry health declaration” upon arrival at the show or exhibition, stating:
 - No known exposure of your flock to sick birds, and no poultry deaths on your premises, within the past 10 days
 - No clinical signs of illness, including respiratory or neurologic disease, within the past 10 days (see list below)

- If a bird shows clinical signs consistent with influenza or other disease, exhibition staff should be notified as soon as possible, the bird should be removed from contact with other birds and the public, and the bird should be tested for avian influenza. The clinical signs of avian influenza are:
 - Sudden death.
 - Wheezing, coughing, nasal discharge
 - Decreased energy
 - Decreased feed intake
 - Drop in egg production or egg quality
 - Swelling and/or discoloration of eyes, head, neck
 - Tremors, circling, drooping wings, twisting of head and neck
- Exhibition staff should contact the State Veterinarian's office at 540-209-9120 in the event of more than one sick bird or unusual bird deaths.
- Record exit/release time of birds
- Staff from the State Veterinarian's office will likely be visiting the fair to examine the birds and collect AI surveillance samples at some point during the exhibition.

For Exhibitors

- Clean cages, food, and water containers daily
- Do not share equipment with other exhibitors
- Minimize contact between your birds and other birds as much as possible
- Minimize your own contact with other birds
- Minimize the number of people who have contact with your birds
- Observe birds daily for signs of influenza-like illness
- Report any influenza-like illness to the designated exhibition veterinarian or the appropriate exhibition staff so the bird can be evaluated
- Birds deemed to be ill should be removed from the exhibition immediately

Human Measures

For Exhibition Organizers

- Provide easy access to hand washing stations
- Post informational signage that includes the following messages:
 - No eating or drinking in the animal areas
 - Wash hands frequently
 - No pacifiers, sipping cups or strollers in the animal areas
 - Biosecurity posters/brochures should be distributed.

If bird influenza-like illness is associated with the exhibition, the State Veterinarian's Office should be notified immediately.

Steps to Take AFTER the Exhibition

Birds Measures

For Exhibit Organizers

- Clean and disinfect the bird exhibition areas. Cleaned and disinfected areas should be allowed dry completely before restocking.

For Exhibitors

- Isolate and observe birds for illness after returning home and before allowing contact with other animals
 - The isolation/observation period for clinical signs of illness should be no fewer than 14 days
 - Tend to the healthy birds at the home facility first and then later to the isolated birds that attended the event
 - Clean and disinfect equipment, clothing, shoes, and vehicles/trailers that were at the exhibition. Allow all cleaned and disinfected items to dry completely before re-use or restocking.
 - Consult a veterinarian or the Virginia Department of Agriculture at 540-209-9120 if birds become ill.

Human Measures

- The current circulating strains of highly pathogenic avian influenza virus are considered very low risk to humans. To date, there have been no known cases of HPAI virus in humans from the current outbreak.
- Consult a health care provider and a county public health official or the Virginia Department of Health as soon as possible if exhibitors or family members develop influenza-like illness
 - Inform the health care provider of close contact with birds and/or exhibition attendant
 - Ill people should avoid all contact with birds until they are fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications