



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
PO Box 400
TRENTON NJ 08625-0400

EDWARD D. WENGRYN
Secretary

MIKIE SHERRILL
Governor

DR. DALE G. CALDWELL
Lt. Governor

February 18, 2026

Dear Backyard Flock Poultry Owner and Public Health Stakeholders:

To report sick or dead **wild birds** in New Jersey, complete the **NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) wild bird disease reporting form** at: <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza/>

To learn more about avian influenza and its impact to domestic poultry, wildlife, and humans, visit NJ's H5N1 landing page at: <https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/ah/livestockhealth/h5n1.shtml>

For questions regarding human safety when handling sick wild birds or domestic poultry, contact your local health department (www.localhealth.nj.gov).

The NJDOH advises individuals to use personal protective equipment (PPE) when in contact with sick or dead birds. PPE is available at each county's Rutgers Cooperative Extension Office. County office contact information is available at <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/county/>.

NJDOH has a guidance flyer for individuals working with wildlife species at risk of exposure to the virus at: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/Novel%20Flu/H5N1_wildlife_workers_flier.pdf

Available in English and Spanish, NJDOH has guidance for individuals who work with domestic poultry at: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/Novel%20Flu/Bird_Flu_Workers_English.pdf
https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/Novel%20Flu/Bird_Flu_Workers_Spanish.pdf

This winter, there have been reports of sick and dead wild birds within the state of New Jersey. Some of which have tested positive for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Last month, one case of HPAI in domestic poultry was identified in Burlington County. In 2025, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) reported eight premises with detections of HPAI in domestic poultry. Exposure to infected wild birds via direct contact or sharing waterers, feeders, or swimming areas is a potential source of disease transmission to domestic poultry. Poultry owners in New Jersey are advised to stay vigilant with their on-farm biosecurity practices and care for their birds. NJDA would like to remind New Jersey poultry owners of their important role in monitoring, reporting, and preventing disease.

NJDA, Division of Animal Health, is responsible for domestic poultry, including commercial and backyard:

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, and nasal discharge
- Swelling around the eyes
- Open-mouth breathing
- Darkening of the comb/wattles
- Reddening of the shanks or feet
- Decreased egg production
- Lethargy

HPAI spreads through contact with bodily secretions from the feces, eyes, nostrils, and mouths of 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 direct encounters with wild birds or their feces. Wild birds can enter backyard flock housing, increasing this risk. Practicing good biosecurity can help prevent the spread of HPAI onto a farm.

Actions poultry farmers can start today to protect their birds include:

- Eliminate exposure of domestic birds to wild birds.
 - Minimize standing water and extra feed in the environment
 - Cover accumulated waste on the property
 - Plug or patch any access holes into poultry housing
 - Add wildlife deterrents
- Avoid contact with other poultry.
- Keep 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.
- Minimize the number of people who visit the birds.
- Avoid sharing equipment with other flocks.
- Use appropriate disinfectants for equipment and vehicles that must enter and exit the farm.

HPAI in poultry 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,



Amar Patil DVM, MVSc, PhD, Diplomate ACVM
 State Veterinarian / Director, New Jersey Department of Agriculture Division of Animal Health
 P.O. Box 400 Trenton, NJ 08625-0330, Phone: (609) 671-6400