

What Happens When a Flock is Infected with Bird Flu?

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Some diseases are highly contagious and deadly and can have a large negative impact on the industry and the economy if they get into a flock. Avian Influenza (bird flu) is a virus affecting poultry and is one of these diseases. There are two types of avian influenza—low pathogenic and high pathogenic. The high pathogenic virus can cause severe disease and death in many types of poultry and must be eradicated as quickly as possible. Bird flu can spread very quickly and is devastating not only to the farmer who has the infection on their farm, but also the Commonwealth's economy, specifically the poultry industry. Infection with high pathogenic avian influenza in the United States can lead to other countries closing their borders to our poultry products, causing lost income to many producers. A state may close live bird markets, auctions, and shows if the disease has been found in flocks in that state to prevent further spread.

Infected birds may show signs of illness, such as decreased feed consumption, decreased egg production, or other signs, or they may just die suddenly. Although ducks and geese may not always appear sick when they are infected, they can still spread the virus to other birds.

What Happens if my flock is suspected of being infected with Bird Flu (as determined by USDA or the PA Department of Agriculture)?

There are several steps a producer must work through when a farm is suspected to have bird flu:

Step 1: Quarantine: A quarantine is placed on the farm to stop movement temporarily.

Step 2: Testing: Swab samples are collected from the flock and tested at the laboratory. If bird flu is identified, the following steps must be taken.

Step 3: Depopulation: All birds remaining on the infected premises will be humanely depopulated.

Step 4: Disposal: Infected and exposed animals and products must be properly disposed of.

Step 5: Cleaning and Disinfection/Virus Elimination: The final step is making sure the farm is free of virus before restocking with birds, so the new flock remains healthy.

Step 6: Restocking

Step 7: Recovery

Step 1: Quarantine: A temporary quarantine is placed on the farm. A quarantine is put in place to help stop the spread of disease off the farm. A quarantine means that no poultry or other birds may

come onto or be removed from the farm. This includes products like eggs and manure. This helps protect your neighbors and the industry within Pennsylvania. The quarantine will remain in place until it can be determined safe to move animals and products again without spreading disease.

Quarantine Process:

- A representative will contact you and temporarily quarantine the farm.
- A quarantine can be put in place verbally, over the phone or in person, and then an official quarantine document is posted at the farm.
- A Case Manager will be assigned to your farm to help you through the process. Your case manager and contact information is: [REDACTED] and they can be reached at [REDACTED]

Step 2: Testing: Swab samples are collected from the flock and tested at the laboratory.

- Someone from the PA Department of Agriculture or USDA, or a Certified Poultry Technician, will come and collect samples to determine if your flock is infected with bird flu. They will contact you about this before they arrive if they have a working phone number to reach you.
- The samples will be tested at one of the PA laboratories.
- Someone at the PA Department of Agriculture will contact you to discuss the results. You as the flock owner will receive **all** test results from your flock.

Step 3: Depopulation of remaining birds:

- If there are live birds on an infected farm, the remainder of the birds are humanly euthanized. This process is called depopulation and will be performed by a trained team from the Department. There are different ways this can be accomplished effectively and humanely. This will be discussed and determined based on the size of the flock and how the farm is set up. Once the depopulation is complete, your case manager will work with you to ensure proper disposal of the animal remains and animal products.
- Some birds may not appear sick, but they can still carry and spread the infection—these are called carrier animals.
- All poultry and other birds on the farm which can be infected with bird flu and have not died yet from the disease will be humanly depopulated by someone trained to do this properly.
- Your case manager will discuss a flock plan with you, which explains the steps that will be taken to eliminate bird flu on your farm and to safely restock your farm.

Step 4: Disposal:

- Infected and exposed animals must be properly disposed of, as required by the PA Dead Animal Disposal Law. Preferred disposal options for flocks infected with bird flu include composting, burial, and incineration. Composting on the farm property is the preferred method, and a composting expert will be available to manage this process. All disposal methods must be approved before being started and starting the disposal before getting approval may delay your release from quarantine.
- Materials which cannot be cleaned and disinfected must also be properly disposed of.

Step 5: Cleaning and Disinfection/Virus Elimination:

- After disposal has been completed, poultry houses and other materials on the farm must be cleaned and disinfected to eliminate the virus. These steps are taken to ensure the virus is no longer alive on the farm and will not infect other birds.
- There are 2 steps to this process:
 - Step 1 (initial virus elimination) involves cleaning up the outside areas to prevent the spread of virus to your neighbors. This involves removing debris, removing weeds, dry cleaning of the outside area, including the outside of fans and outlets, rodent control, etc. After this has been inspected and approved, you can move on to step 2.
 - Step 2 is virus elimination (cleaning and disinfection) in the indoor areas or houses where poultry were kept.
 - There are several methods of virus elimination for step 2, including wet cleaning, dry cleaning, fumigation, heat treating, or extended quarantine times. If a premises can't be entirely cleaned and disinfected properly, it may remain under quarantine for an extended period of 120 days after the completion of disposal and initial virus elimination activities. This includes premises where birds are housed outdoors on bare ground, where cleaning and disinfection is impossible. If you have any questions or concerns during this process you can discuss them with your case manager.

Step 6: Restocking: Birds can be placed once it has been determined that all bird flu virus has been eliminated.

Freedom from disease on the farm can be achieved in 2 ways;

1. Environmental testing: After cleaning and disinfection, officials may collect swab samples from a number of places in the farm environment, and those samples will be tested at the PA state lab.

Environmental testing is often faster than an extended quarantine, but can only be done if everything on the farm can be cleaned and disinfected. If this is an option, your case manager will work with you to decide on a date for samples to be collected.

- If environmental samples are positive for bird flu, another round of cleaning and disinfection may be required.
- After all samples are negative, an official letter will be provided to the farmer to release the quarantine on the farm at least 14 days after the last disinfectant was applied.
- If you plan to restock within 60 days after the quarantine has been released on your farm, a “Restocking Agreement” will be necessary for your farm. This is a partnership between the farmer and officials to continue to work with you to make sure the new flock remains healthy as the farm returns to full production. The new flock will need to be tested 3 times after placement to make sure they remain negative.

2. Extended quarantine: Extended quarantine is when a farm sits empty with no birds on the property for a certain amount of time. This give the virus time to “die out” on its own. This is usually set at 120 days after the completion after the initial virus elimination step.

- No environmental testing is done on farms that have finished an extended quarantine, and an official letter will be provided to the farmer to release the quarantine on the farm after the extended quarantine period has ended.
- No restocking agreement or testing of the new flock is required after the quarantine has been released after an extended quarantine.

Step 7: Recovery:

- *Indemnity* is payment for the value of birds which were lost due to bird flu and is determined by the number of birds alive at the time an official inventory is taken. The amount received is a standard amount determined by USDA. A USDA Field Reimbursement Specialist (FRS) will be assigned to help with this.
- *Compensation* is payment for your costs to eliminate the bird flu virus on your farm.
- Your case manager can provide additional information if you are interested in receiving some indemnity and/or compensation for your losses. A USDA Field Reimbursement Specialist (FRS) will be assigned to help with this.

These steps have been proven by USDA to be the most efficient way to contain outbreaks of highly contagious diseases such as bird flu. While this is a process no producer ever wants to go through,

your case manager is here to help you understand each step of the way and answer any questions you may have.

Please report any suspicion of bird flu to a PA Department of Agriculture veterinarian at **717-772-2852**, **option 1**. Leave a message and someone will call you back quickly.