

# Avian influenza



outbreak alert

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## AVIAN INFLUENZA

Avian influenza is a viral disease that affects chickens, turkeys, guinea fowl and other birds. In poultry, effects range from a mild infection with no symptoms to a severe epidemic that kills up to 100% of infected birds.

Avian influenza is divided into subgroup viruses that are constantly changing. New viruses often form from two or more existing strains. Because of this continuous change, treatment and vaccines are difficult to maintain.

The strain that causes the greatest number of deaths is highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Although other strains have been found in Canada, we have never had an outbreak of HPAI. Outbreaks in other countries have had costly financial repercussions. In 1983-84, the United States experienced a severe epidemic of HPAI in chickens and turkeys. It killed up to 60% of birds in infected flocks and caused a rapid decline in egg production. By the time the disease was eradicated, about 14 million birds had been slaughtered and over \$50 million spent on compensation and control.

Keeping Canada free from HPAI is in the best interests of all Canadians. Read this leaflet carefully and learn what *you* can do to prevent this disease from endangering our poultry industry.

### How avian influenza is spread

Infection most commonly results from:

- contact with wild birds, especially waterfowl which may transmit the disease yet show no symptoms;
- contact with infected poultry;
- contaminated clothing and footwear;
- contaminated vehicles and equipment;
- contaminated feed and water;
- high concentrations of virus in manure and litter;
- biting insects that act as carriers of the disease.



This bird shows typical symptoms of HPAI: congestion and swelling of the comb and wattles, swelling under the eyes and profound depression.

### **If an outbreak should occur in Canada**

Canada's poultry industry is very complex and close relationships exist between all sectors. Avian influenza could, therefore, spread rapidly throughout the country.

In the event of an outbreak, Agriculture Canada has developed an emergency program to control and stamp out the disease. All infected and exposed birds in the area of the outbreak will be slaughtered to prevent further spread. Farmers will be compensated for the loss of their flocks. All flocks in the area will be strictly quarantined. Movement of poultry, poultry products, people and vehicles on infected farms will be restricted. Poultry and eggs at local markets will be tested for the presence of antibodies.

Costs to control and eradicate an outbreak will be substantial; Canadian taxpayers will have to pay the price with higher taxes.

### **Signs of avian influenza: what to look for**

Symptoms of avian influenza vary widely, depending on the strain. Some strains induce mild to severe respiratory distress, with or without diarrhea, while in others diarrhea may be the only symptom.

In the 1983-84 outbreak in the United States, symptoms occurred 5 to 7 days after exposure to the virus. As the amount of virus in flocks increased and more birds became infected, symptoms occurred only 2 to 3 days after exposure.





Congestion of the legs is a common symptom.

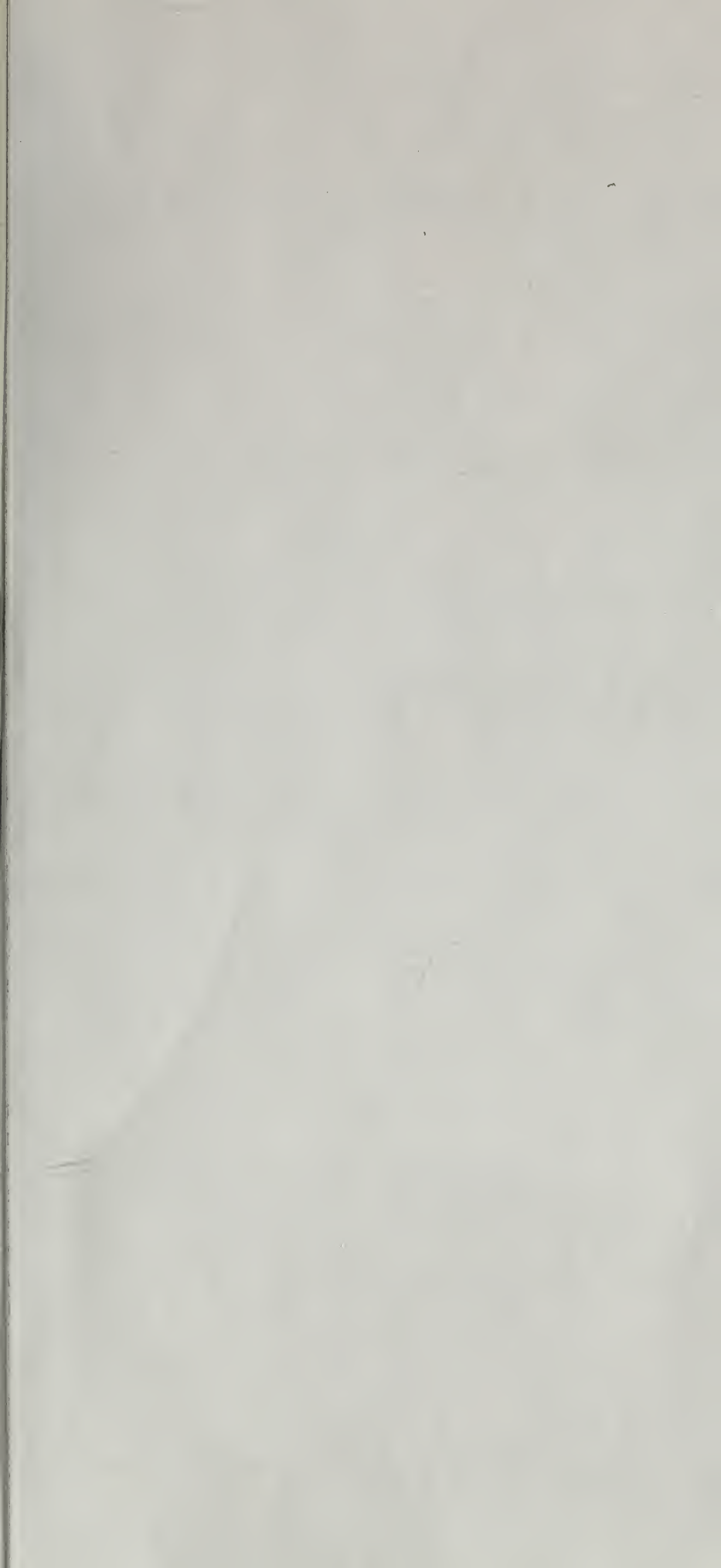
You may notice some or all of the following symptoms in infected birds:

- They become quiet and extremely depressed.
- Wattles and combs become swollen and congested.
- The skin under their eyes swells.
- They develop diarrhea.
- Blisters appear on their combs.
- They suddenly produce far less eggs, many of which are soft-shelled or shell-less.

Deaths may be few for several days, but an epidemic follows that kills hundreds or thousands of birds each day. Diagnosis of avian influenza may be made on the basis of symptoms and events leading to the disease. However, since the symptoms and course of avian influenza are similar to other diseases, laboratory diagnosis is essential.

## **Prevention**

To prevent HPAI from entering Canada, the government imposes strict regulations on our imports of poultry and poultry products from foreign countries. At ports of entry, poultry vehicles and equipment are inspected and often disinfected to ensure that they are free from the disease. Travellers from abroad may also carry agents of HPAI on their clothing and footwear or bring the disease into Canada in poultry products. Travellers and customs officials must be alert to this possibility.







In the severe 1983 outbreak in Pennsylvania, slaughtered birds were buried in landfill sites.

## What YOU can do

When travelling:

- Declare all poultry products you wish to bring into Canada.
- If you visit a farm while abroad, make sure that clothing and footwear you wear on the farm are free from soil and manure before entering Canada.
- If you visit a farm while abroad, do not go near a Canadian farm for 14 days.

On your farm:

- Don't visit areas where HPAI is known to occur.
- Keep strict control over access to your poultry houses by people and equipment.
- Ensure that reusable equipment is cleaned and disinfected before you take it into poultry houses.
- Discourage wild birds from visiting your farm; do not have bird feeders and duck ponds.
- Maintain high sanitation standards.
- Should you notice symptoms of HPAI in your poultry, contact your veterinarian or notify Agriculture Canada. It's your moral obligation to Canada's poultry industry.

For more information, contact:

Animal Health Division  
Agriculture Canada  
2255 Carling Avenue  
Ottawa K1A 0Y9  
Telephone: (613) 995-5433

or the nearest Agriculture Canada veterinary inspection office.

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