

# Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Nova Scotia

What is HPAI? Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is a contagious viral disease affecting poultry and wild birds. It can cause severe illness and high mortality in domestic flocks. The current strain(s) circulating in Canada pose significant risks to farm operations of all sizes. While primarily a poultry disease, HPAI can also impact other wild and domestic mammals, (including dairy cattle) and in rare cases can affect humans.

## Signs of HPAI in Poultry

- Sudden increase in mortality rates.
- Respiratory distress (gasping, coughing, nasal discharge).
- Swollen combs, wattles, legs, or head.
- Decreased food and water intake.
- Drop in egg production or soft-shelled eggs.
- Neurological signs (twisting neck, tremors, paralysis).

## Signs of HPAI in Dairy Cattle

- Reduced milk production – a significant and sudden drop in milk yield.
- Thickened or abnormal milk – milk may appear colostrum-like, thicker, or contain clots.
- Decreased feed intake – affected cows may show reduced appetite.
- Lethargy & depression – cattle appear weak, dull or reluctant to move.
- Fever – elevated body temperature.
- Respiratory signs (less common) – occasional coughing, nasal discharge, or difficulty breathing.
- Digestive disturbances – constipation or diarrhea may be observed in some cases.

In both poultry and cattle the unexplained mortalities of birds or mammals (ie cats/skunks) on the premise may be indicative of HPAI.

## How is HPAI Spread?

HPAI is primarily spread through direct contact with infected birds, their droppings, or contaminated surfaces (equipment, clothing, vehicles). Wild birds, especially waterfowl, are common carriers and can introduce the virus to farms.

Contaminated feed, water and equipment can also spread the disease. For dairy animals cattle to cattle transmission is the primary route of spread.

Farms with both poultry and cattle must take extra precautions. Contaminated feed, water, and shared equipment can serve as transmission pathways. Farm workers and visitors moving between poultry and dairy areas can inadvertently spread the virus.

## Biosecurity Measures for all Farms

- Regardless of farm size, strong biosecurity measures are essential to prevent the spread of HPAI.
- Restrict access.
- Limit visitors and unnecessary movement of people, animals, and equipment.
- Maintain a logbook of all farm visitors.
- Establish designated clean and dirty areas for poultry and dairy handling.
- Control wild birds and pests.
- Keep poultry housed or use netting to prevent contact with wild birds.
- Secure feed and water sources to avoid contamination.
- Control rodents and other pests that could spread the virus.

## Cleaning & Disinfection

- Regularly clean and disinfect boots, tools, and equipment.
- Use properly maintained footbaths with disinfectant at barn entrances or change footwear.
- Wash hands before and after handling birds or dairy cattle.
- Change clothing and footwear before handling your flock or cattle if you have been in contact with other animals.
- Manage workflow.

## Monitor Flock & Herd Health

- Conduct daily health checks for both poultry and dairy cattle and report any signs of illness.
- Isolate sick birds and any symptomatic livestock immediately.
- Contact a veterinarian or the CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) for guidance.

## Limit Off-Farm Exposure

- Restrict Access.
- Avoid visiting other farms or coming into contact with unknown birds or livestock.
- Post and enforce biosecurity signs.
- Do not share equipment.

## Proper Carcass Disposal

- Follow provincial guidelines for disposing of deceased birds or livestock.
- Do not leave carcasses exposed where scavengers can access them.

## New Stock

- **Quarantine Period:** Isolate new animals for a minimum of 2-4 weeks before introducing them to the main herd/flock to monitor for signs of illness.
- **Health Screening:** Ensure all incoming animals have a recent veterinary health check, required vaccinations, and testing for diseases relevant to your farm.
- **Source Verification:** Purchase livestock from reputable sources with strong biosecurity and herd health programs to reduce the risk of disease introduction.
- **Separate Equipment & Handling:** Use dedicated or thoroughly disinfected equipment for quarantined animals to prevent cross-contamination.
- **Monitor & Gradual Introduction:** Observe animals daily for signs of illness and introduce them gradually to minimize stress and reduce disease transmission risks.

## What to Do if You Suspect HPAI?

If you suspect HPAI in your flock or have concerns about livestock exposure:

- Immediately contact your veterinarian and the CFIA by phone (902)536-1010 or via email: [KentvilleAH@inspection.gc.ca](mailto:KentvilleAH@inspection.gc.ca).
- Because HPAI in dairy cattle is emerging, ongoing surveillance and veterinary reporting are essential. If you suspect HPAI in dairy cattle, contact your herd veterinarian immediately.
- Isolate the affected animals.
- Stop animal movements until disease status is known.
- Implement personal safety precautions.
- Do not consume or feed raw milk.
- Follow biosecurity protocols to prevent further spread.
- Do NOT handle wild birds. Report abnormal wild bird mortalities to the Department of Natural Resources District Offices 1-800-565-2224.

**Avian Influenza is now designated as a Reportable Disease in NS under the NS Animal Health and Protection Act and Regulations. Under the regulations all suspected and confirmed cases are reportable to the NS CVO immediately by phone and by writing within 24 hours.**

**For updates and additional resources consult the CFIA website:** [inspection.canada.ca/en/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/diseases/reportable/avian-influenza/latest-bird-flu-situation/hpai-dashboards](https://inspection.canada.ca/en/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/diseases/reportable/avian-influenza/latest-bird-flu-situation/hpai-dashboards)

**Protect your farm, your birds, your livestock, and the industry—implement strong biosecurity today!**

