# Guidance for dealing with sick or dead birds during an H5 bird flu outbreak

BIRD FLU
KNOW WHAT TO DO

## General public and private landowners

### Who should read this

This guidance is intended for the general public and for people who have sick or dead wild or domestic birds on their property.

It provides information on keeping safe and disposing of dead birds during an H5 bird flu (H5N1 avian influenza clade 2.3.4.4b) outbreak in New Zealand. However, it is useful advice for dealing with sick or dead birds generally.

### About avian influenza

Bird flu is a highly contagious viral disease that mainly affects birds. It can also spread to mammals including, on rare occasions, people.

There are two main types of avian influenza:

- High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI), which can cause severe signs and high death rates in birds. There are a number of strains including H5, H7, and H9.
- Low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI), which typically causes few or no signs in birds but can possibly mutate to HPAI.

H5 bird flu has caused the deaths of millions of birds overseas, including both wild and domesticated birds, such as poultry and other pet birds, and is now in New Zealand.

Human infection with any strain of bird flu is rare. It is usually only found in people who have had a lot of contact with infected birds or other infected animals. Sustained human-to-human transmission has not been reported.

Overseas, some mammals, including dairy cattle in the United States, have been infected after contact with infected birds. With supportive care, infected cattle generally recover in two to three weeks.

H5 bird flu is not a food safety concern and the risk to human health is assessed as low. However, if it becomes widespread in the wild bird population, we won't be able to eradicate it from wild birds or prevent them from continuing to spread the virus. By following good biosecurity practices, we can limit its impact.

### If you suspect H5 bird flu, contact MPI's exotic pest and disease hotline

If you see three or more sick or dead wild birds or marine mammals (such as seals or sea lions) in a group, report it immediately to the exotic pest and disease hotline on **0800 80 99 66**. You can also report online at report.mpi.govt.nz The hotline operates 24/7.

Do not handle or move dead or dying birds unless advised otherwise. This helps prevent the spread of the virus and protects your health.

Provide as much detail as you can, including:

- a GPS reading or other precise location information
- photographs and videos of sick and dead birds
- species name and estimate the numbers affected
- how many are sick or freshly dead, and the total number of birds present.

We will note the details and an incursion investigator will contact you.

### If you find sick or dead birds

During an H5 bird flu outbreak, you may find sick or dead birds in public areas such as national parks and reserves, beaches, parks, roads and footpaths, private land, or areas that government agencies or councils are responsible for.

Sick or dead birds can carry diseases that can cause illness in humans, not just bird flu. For this reason, it is good practice to avoid touching or interacting with birds or anything contaminated with bird faeces or secretions. Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and good hygiene if you need to handle sick or dead birds.



You may incorporate tikanga or other cultural practices if you think it is appropriate and can be done safely. Practices may differ depending on where the H5 bird outbreak has occurred and what tikanga, kawa or other cultural practices are appropriate for your area.

## Landowner responsbility

MPI is responsible for coordinating New Zealand's response to H5 bird flu in partnership with the Department of Conservation, the Ministry of Health, and Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora. Local and regional councils, iwi and hapū, industry and community groups are also involved.

If H5 bird flu becomes widespread in New Zealand wild birds, it may not be practical for MPI, partner agencies, councils or other community groups to intervene on private land.

Landowners, or those responsible for managing the property, are responsible for birds and animals that are sick or dead on their land. Keep up-to-date with MPI's website for the latest information.

## Sick birds

Leaving birds that are sick or possibly infected with H5 bird flu alone will give them the best chance of survival and reduce the risk of further spread. Disturbing birds which might be recovering or nesting can cause stress or lead to worse outcomes for the animal.

If you choose to seek advice from a vet or wildlife rehabilitation centre, contact them by phone first. Do not take a sick bird to a veterinarian or wildlife rehabilitation centre (or similar) unannounced. For animal welfare reasons, birds sick with H5 bird flu may need to be euthanised if they cannot be cared for and rehabilitated.

Keep domestic animals and people away from the birds to prevent disturbance and potential infection.

## Dead birds

It is best to leave dead birds to decompose naturally, including on private land. However, there may be some situations where you, as a landowner or manager, need to take action.

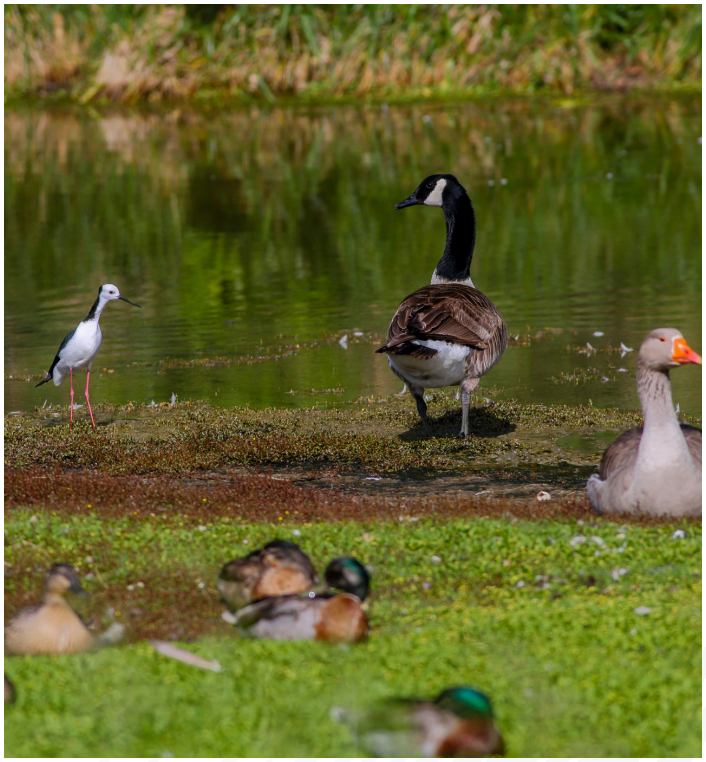
Consider the questions below to help decide if dead birds need to be moved and disposed of:

- Are they located in an area where people may pick them up?
- Is there a risk that pets, livestock, or other animals could interact with the dead birds?
- How many birds are there? Large numbers of animal carcasses can contaminate ground and surface waters.
- Are the birds in an area which may risk further disease spread (e.g. near a bird colony or public access area)?
- Do you have personal protective equipment?

## Be alert for signs of H5 bird flu

The most obvious sign of H5 bird flu is the sudden death or sickness in several birds. Sickness signs can include:

- weakness and trembling
- paralysis
- breathing difficulties
- lack of coordination
- blindness
- diarrhoea.



Poultry can show more severe signs of infection. If you own poultry, find more information about keeping your birds safe from H5 bird flu at: Bird flu and protecting your birds

## Handling advice

### If you do need to take action to move sick or dead birds, we recommend that you follow these steps:

- Wear PPE such as gloves and eye protection. If you can't wear PPE, then do not touch sick or dead birds.
- Sick birds can be picked up placing a towel over the top of them and scooping them up and placing them in a ventilated cardboard box (for example, a cardboard box with breathing holes in the top and sides).
- Wear clothing that will stop you being injured by scratches or bites (such as trousers and long sleeves).
- Keep birds outside – avoid bringing birds into your house or an enclosed space.
- If you need to take the bird in a vehicle, keep it as far away from you as possible. Wear a mask while driving and keep the windows open while you travel.
- With dead birds, use a tool such as a shovel or spade to pick them up rather than handling them directly.

### After handling a sick or dead bird you will need to:

- Wash your clothing and any other protective equipment used with detergent. If possible, dry your clothes on a high heat.
- Dispose of gloves and any other disposable items that may have been contaminated by the bird by putting them in a plastic bag (and not letting the items touch the outside of the bag), tying or sealing the bag and then placing it in your outdoor rubbish bin.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Clean any surfaces that may have been contaminated by the bird using disinfectant cleaning products or disinfectant wipes. Household disinfectant (e.g. bleach) is appropriate.

**Important: If you feel unwell after being around or handling birds, please seek medical advice.**

For more information about keeping yourself safe:

Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora – Avian influenza

# Disposal options

Disposing of dead birds and infected material, such as used PPE or plastic bags, is an important part of stopping the disease spreading further.

If you determine that moving dead birds is likely to be safer than leaving them to decompose, using the considerations above, there are a few options for disposal.

## Small numbers of dead birds

If you have a small number of dead birds, or a high number of smaller dead birds (e.g. sparrows) on your land, you may be able to dispose of them yourself. Possible disposal options are:

- household rubbish collection
- burial on private land
- landfill or transfer station.

**Important: check with your regional council to see if there are any rules or requirements that might apply.**

## Household rubbish

If you choose to dispose of dead wild birds in your household rubbish, where allowable to do so, you should:

- Wear PPE such as gloves and eye protection. Pick up the dead bird with a plastic bag over your hand or use a shovel.
- Put the birds in another plastic or other single use bag, making sure they do not touch the outside of the bag, and then tie it.
- Put the bag, with the bird in it, in a second leak proof plastic bag along with the gloves or plastic bag you used to pick the bird up with (taking care not to touch the outside of these items with your bare hands), and then tie the bag.
- Put the bag in your outdoor rubbish bin.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Clean and disinfect any outdoor or gardening equipment used with a hose outside. Household disinfectant (e.g. bleach) is appropriate.

## Burial

If you choose to bury wild birds on land you own or are responsible for, and where allowable to do so, you should:

- Avoid burying them near any natural sources of water (for example, stream, river, lake, or ocean) or where they could contaminate local water supplies.
- Dig a hole at least 60cm deep to stop animals digging it up, then cover the birds with all removed earth.
- Wear disposable gloves or use a plastic bag if you need to pick up the birds. Alternatively, you can pick them up with a shovel.
- If you used gloves or a plastic bag to pick up the dead birds, put the used items inside another plastic bag (taking care not to touch the outside of these items with your bare hands), tie the bag and dispose of it in an outdoor rubbish bin. Do not bury them in a plastic bag.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Clean and disinfect any outdoor or gardening equipment you may have used with a hose outside. Household disinfectant (e.g. bleach) is appropriate.

**Important: contact your local landfill, waste management operator or council to find out which facilities will accept animal waste.**

## Landfill

If you choose to dispose of wild birds in a landfill or transfer station, where allowable to do so, you should:

- Ensure the carcasses are double-bagged and placed in a leak proof container when transported to the landfill or transfer station.
- Place the secured container in the back (tray/tub) of a ute or boot of a car and travel to the landfill with the windows open while travelling.
- Clean and disinfect the container after disposal. Household disinfectant (e.g. bleach) is appropriate.

## Disposing of large numbers of dead birds

For higher numbers of dead birds on your property that you cannot deal with, contact the local council responsible for waste disposal in your district.

## Disposal options for livestock farmers and other larger landowners

For farms or large landowners who have dead wild birds or backyard poultry on their land, this guidance is intended to complement existing practices in place, such as calling the exotic pest and disease hotline – **0800 80 99 66** – and contacting your local council. Poultry or other bird farmers will need to contact their industry representative group or MPI directly for disposal options.

**Important: check in with your regional council for any rules or requirements that might apply to these disposal options.**

For more information about risk to livestock from bird flu and how to prepare your farm: Ministry for Primary Industries – Avian influenza: dairy cattle and other livestock

## Cleaning and disinfection

If farm or similar equipment is used for moving and burying dead birds, thoroughly clean and disinfect any areas of equipment that have had contacted with the birds. This includes any vehicles used, particularly their tyres and other areas where dirt, faeces or secretions (e.g. blood, feathers, skin) is likely to accumulate.

## Stay informed about H5 bird flu

Ministry for Primary Industries – www.mpi.govt.nz/HPAI

Department of Conservation – www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/wildlife-health/avian-influenza

Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora – www.info.health.nz/conditions-treatments/infectious-diseases/avian-influenza

Avian influenza health and safety guidance – www.tewhatuora.govt.nz/publications/avian-influenza-health-safety-guidance

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