



Feb 2025



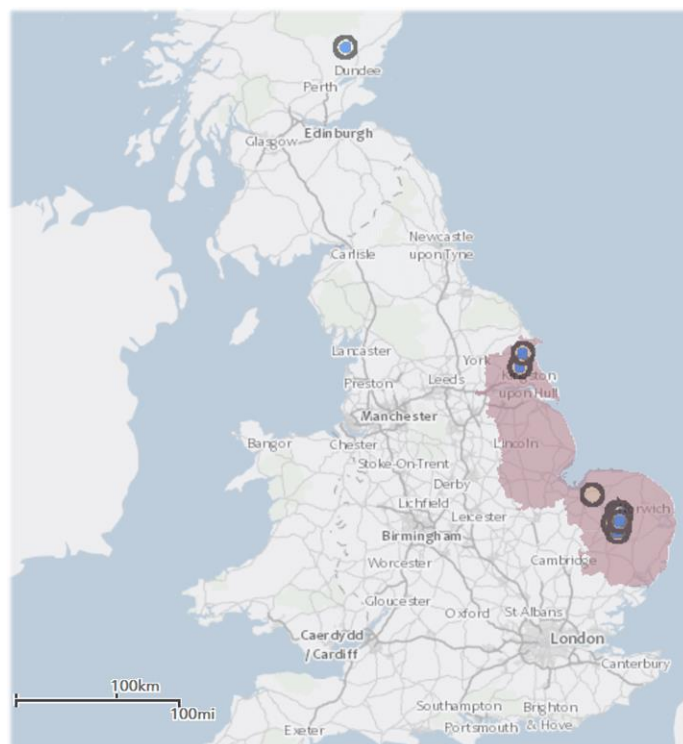
New year, new ewe? We're here to help you achieve your 2025 livestock goals! Articles you'll find in this quarter's newsletter cover:

- Avian Influenza
- Mycoplasma in poultry
- Bluetongue Update

AVIAN FLU

A new outbreak of Highly Avian Influenza (HPAI) was reported in November which can cause severe disease and high mortality. Chickens, turkeys, geese, quail, and ducks are usually affected - waterfowl and shorebirds are the natural hosts for the virus - sometimes they won't show signs of illness but will still shed the virus and spread it to other birds. Once established in wild birds, it can spread around the world as birds migrate across continents. The cases of the current outbreak are currently limited to mostly Eastern England with a new case recently reported in Angus, Scotland. Control and prevention zones have been set up to limit the spreading of the virus to different regions. Avian flu can occur at any time of the year however there is a seasonal increase in the risk of a bird flu outbreak associated with the winter migration patterns of wild birds. Avian flu is spread from bird to bird through indirect and direct contact with nasal secretions,

infected saliva, faeces, and scavenging/predation. Dirty footwear, clothing, equipment, and vehicles can carry the virus so good biosecurity is an excellent way to reduce the chances of it entering your flock



Map of HPAI positive cases and zones (ArcGIS web application)

Birds infected with HPAI usually show some (or all) of the following signs:

- Sudden death
- Lethargy, depression, lying down and unresponsiveness
- Swollen head
- Lack of coordination
- Reduced feed intake
- Closed and runny eyes
- Wings drooping
- Blue discoloration/swelling of comb and wattles
- Body and head shaking or twisting
- Respiratory problems such as open-mouth breathing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling, and nasal snicking (coughing)
- Discoloured or loose watery faeces

- Significant drop or stop in egg production
- Dragging of the legs
- Sudden increase/decrease in water intake
- Fever
- Haemorrhages and redness under the skin of the neck and shanks of the legs

It is important to remember that there's a wide variation of symptoms and severity. A bird showing signs other than those listed above or not at all could still be infected with HPAI. A recent case of a HPAI-positive emu had twisting of the neck as the



*Purple discoloration of comb and wattles
(Avian influenza in poultry)*

only symptom. HPAI is rapidly fatal for poultry (one of the main signs of an outbreak is a sudden and rapid increase in dead birds) except ducks and geese which can show little or no signs. Therefore it is good practice at this time to separate the rest of your poultry from ducks and geese as the disease might be transmitted unknowingly.

How to prevent HPAI from getting into your flock:

- Check outside your flock's housing daily and remove any wild birds' faeces and feathers
- Keep water, food, and bedding in enclosed areas so that wild birds cannot access or contaminate them
- If bedding such as shavings and straw are kept outside, they must be covered and unwrapped before entering the house.
- Reduce food sources for wild birds.
- Maintain high biosecurity standards such as footbaths and clean and disinfect hard surfaces, and equipment such as crates, containers, plastic egg trays, buckets, and wheelbarrows regularly.
- Separate new or returning birds from your flock for at least 30 days. Use separate equipment for the separated birds and handle the new birds last.

- Keep a record of all people who visit your birds' housing including dates and contact details. This is especially helpful for HPAI and Newcastle disease.
- Reduce the number of people who have access to your birds to reduce the risk of disease.
- Keep a close watch on your birds for any signs of disease and contact us if you have any concerns.
- Prevent wild birds from nesting or roosting on your housing and repair any gaps or holes to stop wild birds from getting in.
- Fix leaks, blocked drains, or downpipes to stop contaminated water from getting in.
- Remove moss from the housing roof as it attracts wild birds
- Prevent your birds from accessing standing water (netting works well)
- If you have any open water on your property, fence it off and if possible, cover it with netting.
- If you are highly suspicious of Avian Flu, avoid entering the housing or handling the birds until you have spoken with APHA or us.
- Do not touch or move any sick or wild birds.

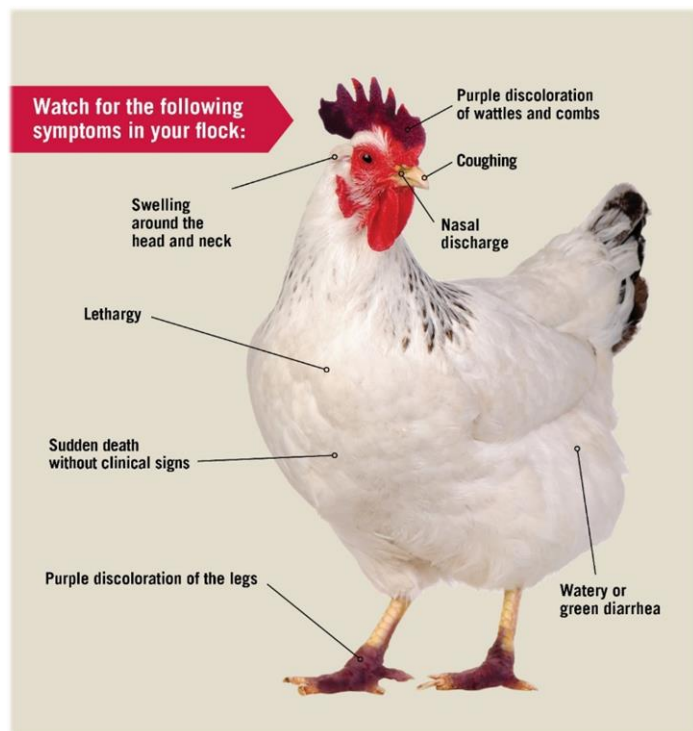
If you find any dead wild birds, use the online reporting system which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds>, or call the Defra helpline on 0345933557

Due to the outbreak, the public is discouraged from feeding gulls, geese, swans, and ducks as this could encourage them to gather, increasing transmission risk. Garden birds currently seem relatively unaffected by avian flu.

The UK Health Security Agency says current evidence suggests that the avian influenza viruses we're seeing circulating in birds around the world do not spread easily to humans however the virus can spread to people in close contact with infected birds. In the last few years, no severe illness has resulted. The Food Standards Agency has said that avian influenza poses a very low risk for UK consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products are safe to eat.

Most captive birds and poultry cannot be vaccinated against bird flu - it is not a routine measure to control the disease. Zoo birds however

can be vaccinated, after going through the proper channels, for conservation reasons. It's possible that some vaccinated birds would still be capable of transmitting the disease if they became infected whilst not displaying clinical signs which is why vaccines are only licensed for zoo birds.



Common Signs of HPAI in Poultry (Avian Influenza (flu) - UGA vetmed 2023)

Bird flu is a **notifiable disease** in poultry and other captive birds meaning that if you do not report it, you are breaking the law. If you suspect bird flu in your flock, you must report it by calling 03000200301.

SHEEP SCANNING

Don't forget to book your pregnancy scans in the optimal window 60-90 days from ram going in. From 40 days post ram removal with ideal windows 60-80 post removal. Please keep them in overnight and withhold feed for 10 hours for more accurate scans. Scanning can help estimate lamb numbers for ration planning. It is an early indicator of barren rate and can allow for early investigation of any problems. It is good practice to body condition score your sheep at this time and identify any lameness.

MYCOPLASMA IN POULTRY

Mycoplasma is a slow-growing bacteria that is found in many species including humans. There are different types found in specific species/groups, the most important ones in

chickens and turkeys being *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (MG) and *Mycoplasma synoviae* (MS). Young birds are more susceptible than old birds and turkeys are more susceptible than chickens.

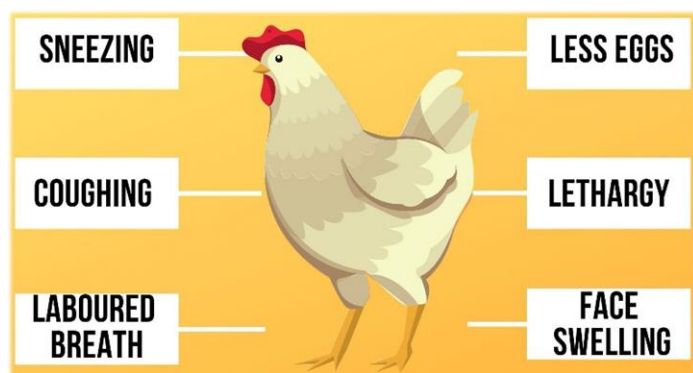
It is spread between chickens/turkeys via other birds' feathers, droppings, eggs, dust, and respiratory secretions, and from parent to chick. Rats and wild birds can also carry the bacteria into the house. It doesn't live in the environment very long (usually about 2 days) however it can still be transmitted by equipment such as cages and shovels that were in contact with infected birds as well as your clothes, shoes, skin, and hair - MG can live in your nose for up to 1 day and in your hair for up to 3 days!)

Clinical symptoms take time to appear because they develop slowly; therefore, the infection may remain unknown for some time. MG will produce signs of flu-like symptoms with a runny nose, sneezing, open mouth breathing, swollen face, and eyelids, and can cause chronic respiratory disease (CRD). MS on the other hand can cause lameness, pale/discoloured combs, swollen joints, and ruffled feathers. MS and MG infections can result in listlessness, weight loss, and decreased appetite. As with a cold in humans, Mycoplasma will make some birds sicker than others depending on several factors such as the health of their immune system. Some birds do unfortunately succumb to the infection. Signs may not appear for 3 weeks, some will show no signs at all but will still carry and spread the disease. MS and MG won't make humans sick and eggs are usually still safe to eat depending on which medication is used and its withdrawal time. MS and MG can be tested for using a blood test or tracheal swab for PCR however results cannot always be heavily relied on as false positives aren't uncommon.

Treatment involves the use of an antibiotic such as tylosin and tetracyclines. This helps manage the disease as there is no cure but the bird will be a carrier for life and will infect any new additions to the flock.

Prevention is better than cure which really rings true for Mycoplasma as once it's in your flock, there is no full way of getting rid of it without fully depopulating. Biosecurity is a great way to prevent introducing infectious molecules into the house

such as a separate set of clothes and shoes when working with the birds, a footpath with a scrubbing brush, and appropriate disinfectant. Keep dust levels low. Try not to share equipment with neighbours/friends. If you must, thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment first. Luckily, *Mycoplasma* does not live in the environment long and is easily inactivated by most disinfectants. If you've visited another flock, shower, and change clothes and shoes before working with your own. Isolate new additions to the flock for 30 days using separate housing, clothes, shoes, and equipment and always list/feed new birds last. Birds can be tested before being introduced but as mentioned above, test methods aren't always highly reliable. Purchasing birds from a *Mycoplasma*-free herd is a great way to keep *Mycoplasma* out of your flock.



Common symptoms of Mycoplasma (Dine-A-Chook Australia, 2019)

BTV UPDATE

The total number of cases in Great Britain for the 2024 to 2025 vector season is 185. As you will have seen from the frequent updates the zone has extended further covering a large proportion of England and includes all or part of 29 counties and unitary authorities (now around 25% of GB). Cases outside of the zone have been traced back to movements from areas where the disease is now known to be circulating before bluetongue restrictions were put in place.

A new bluetongue case map is available on the [GOV.UK](#) Bluetongue page outlining locations of all premises in GB where animals have tested positive by PCR to bluetongue serotype 3 alongside the control zone map and cattle/sheep population densities.

The most recent cases being found in Hampshire were due to surveillance testing rather than reported clinical cases. During the winter months with lower temperatures, we are now in a low transmission period. Midges responsible for spreading the disease will no longer replicate the

virus to facilitate its onward spread and their activity has also greatly declined.

This has meant some changes to movement licenses; moves from the restriction zone (RZ) to dedicated slaughter markets (red marts) outside the zone for immediate slaughter are now allowed. Moves from the RZ to approved breeding sales outside the zone with pre and post-movement testing are also allowed. For more detailed information and to see the latest updates please check the government website.

The vaccines are now accessible to us should you want to vaccinate your animals against the bluetongue virus and can now be used anywhere in England. The decision on whether to do this or not is entirely up to the individual - with some owners looking to the coming spring to do this. Again, these vaccines do not stop animals from contracting or spreading the disease but can reduce the symptoms and the impact the virus has on the animals. There is only limited data available for many aspects of these vaccines, including the period of immunity they provide. Please get in touch to let us know if you want to vaccinate your animals or if you want to discuss the vaccinations for BTv-3.

The full impact of bluetongue on the fertility of animals in the UK will not become apparent until we reach the spring and summer periods. It is expected that BTv-3 will be more widespread in the UK in 2025 than it has been in 2024 with the height of risk period during the summer as midge activity peaks. Furthermore, with other strains of bluetongue circulating in Europe, it will be essential to keep up to date with bluetongue updates in the coming year.

References

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WHATSAPP

Please continue to use Whatsapp to keep your vet updated on cases and ask non-urgent questions. For any urgent questions or to book a visit please ring (the old fashioned way i.e. not via Whatsapp) the office (07912281994) to ensure your request is dealt with promptly.