



AVIAN INFLUENZA

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza is a viral disease of birds. It is split into two categories: high pathogenicity and low pathogenicity, based on its ability to cause severe disease in chickens. It is further categorized by the surface proteins produced by the virus, hemagglutinin (H) and neuraminidase (N). For example, the avian influenza virus that has been circulating globally since 2020 and infecting poultry farms and wild birds around the world is a highly pathogenic H5N1 strain.

2. How does it spread?

An infected bird sheds virus in its body fluids and in the air that it breathes out. Birds can therefore transmit the virus through close contact with each other or with contact with faeces, feather dust, or anything that has been contaminated by infected birds, such as vehicles, feed, clothing, shoes and equipment. Wild birds are often responsible for spreading the virus between farms and between countries.

3. How can we prevent it?

There is no treatment or vaccine currently available for high pathogenicity avian influenza in South Africa, so the only way we can prevent outbreaks is to prevent the spread of the virus. This entails observing strict biosecurity measures to prevent contact between poultry and other potentially infected birds. People should not move unnecessarily between properties that keep poultry and vehicles and equipment that move must be cleaned and disinfected between farms.

4. Can people get it?

Some avian influenza viruses have the ability to infect mammals, including humans, though the risk is low. Those infected usually have been in close contact with infected birds, either working with them or slaughtering them. Anyone visiting an infected property or handling birds with avian influenza should wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including a high-quality mask, disposable gloves, overalls and foot coverings.

5. Are chicken and eggs safe to eat?

Chicken and eggs sold in supermarkets come only from farms that do not have avian influenza. Infected farms are immediately quarantined and no poultry or poultry products may leave the farm, so they do not enter the human food chain. Poultry products on the



informal market cannot be guaranteed, but thorough cooking of meat and eggs destroys influenza viruses.

6. What should I do if my chickens are sick?

Chickens with avian influenza can show signs of difficulty breathing, discolouration of the skin of the face and legs, twisted necks, loss of appetite, diarrhoea and a drop in egg production. Often, however, sudden deaths are the only sign seen. If avian influenza is suspected, please contact your nearest state veterinarian immediately so that the spread of the disease can be contained.

CONTACTS:

TITLE	CONTACT NO.	E-MAIL	ADDRESS
State Veterinarian: George	044-803-3771/0	SVGeorge@ westerncape.gov.za	4 Varing Avenue, George
State Veterinarian: Boland	021-808-5028/ 5253	SVBoland@ westerncape.gov.za	Western Cape Department of Agriculture building, Muldersvlei road, Elsenburg
State Veterinarian: Swellendam	021-808-5059/ 028-425-4850	DOA.svswellendam@ westerncape.gov.za	67 Voortrekker St, Swellendam
State Veterinarian: Beaufort West	023-414-9220/1	DOA.svbeaufortwest@ westerncape.gov.za	Blyth St, Beaufort West
State Veterinarian: Vredendal	027-201-3514/-0	DOA.svredendal@ westerncape.gov.za	Cnr Matzikama and Noord St. Vredendal
State Veterinarian: Malmesbury	022-433-8915/0	DOA.svmalmesbury@ westerncape.gov.za	Cnr Spoorweg and Munisipale St, Malmesbury
State Veterinarian: Oudtshoorn	044-203-9443/5	DOA.svoudtshoorn@ westerncape.gov.za	43 Van Der Riet St, Oudtshoorn
State Veterinarian: Worcester	021-808-5052	DOA.svworcester@ westerncape.gov.za	30 Van Arckel St, Worcester