



Avian influenza

Information for hunters and gatherers

Although the risk of getting avian influenza (AI) from wild birds is very low, it is important for people who hunt, handle, and eat wild birds, including their eggs, to take precautions to avoid becoming infected or spreading the virus. Hunters and people who prepare and cook wild birds and eggs may be at a higher risk.

General precautions

- Before hunting birds or harvesting eggs, check the hunting regulations in your area
- Do not handle or eat sick birds or birds that have died from unknown causes
- Following general food safety guidance when hunting is always recommended

Accessing wild bird nesting areas

Avian influenza (AI) can spread between different bird communities when potentially contaminated material (such as bird droppings or feces, dirt, or water) is transferred between bird nesting areas.

Items to bring or wear:

- Rubber boots
- Gloves (multiple pairs)
- Small brush for cleaning
- Hand sanitizer

When traveling between separate bird communities, such as moving far distances on land or between islands:

- brush off organic material (such as dirt, bird droppings, plant matter) from clothing before leaving the site
- remove organic material (such as dirt, bird droppings, plant matter) from rubber boots by stomping feet or using a brush to clean the bottom of the boots, and use nearby salt water to rinse them
- change gloves, wash hands or use hand sanitizer between bird nesting areas
- while in a bird nesting area, try to minimize contact with freshwater ponds or wet areas, if possible
- when preparing and having meals on islands, try to select a site furthest away from bird community activity



Handling wild birds, waterfowl, and their eggs

Practice good hand hygiene at all times:

- wash your hands with soap and water
- use hand sanitizer when you can't use soap and water
- wear vinyl, latex, nitrile, or rubber gloves when possible
- avoid touching your face or rubbing your eyes with your hands
- do not eat, drink or smoke

Choose a suitable work environment before you start:

- work in a well-ventilated space, outdoors if possible, and stay upwind of birds to avoid inhaling dust, feathers and particles in the air
- keep young children and pets away from the area, and discourage them from playing in areas that could be contaminated with droppings
- avoid potential contamination of areas that are accessed by domestic birds for feed or water

Avoid potential sources of contamination while you work:

- avoid direct contact with blood, feces or droppings, and other bodily fluids
- avoid harvesting cracked and very dirty eggs covered with feces or droppings
- rub dirt and debris off of eggs with a clean and dry paper towel, cloth, or brush; do not use water to wash or soak eggs

Clean all surfaces, tools, and personal belongings once you are finished:

- wash hands immediately with soap and warm water
- if there is no water available, remove any dirt using a moist towelette, apply an alcohol-based hand gel (between 60% and 90% alcohol), and wash your hands with soap and water as soon as you can
- wash all knives, tools, egg collecting and cleaning equipment, work surfaces and other equipment with soap and warm water, followed by a household disinfectant or bleach solution (5 teaspoons of bleach to 8 cups of water)
- remove and wash clothing and footwear that may be contaminated with blood, feces or droppings, or other bodily fluids
- store dirty shoes and clothing in a sealed plastic bag until they can be washed



Cooking and preparing eggs and meat from wild birds

There is no evidence to suggest that fully cooked game birds or eggs are a source of AI infection.

Make sure all harvested birds and eggs are cooked thoroughly (no visible pink meat, and juice runs clear).

Using a food thermometer:

- cook whole birds until the inside temperature reaches 82°C (180°F)
- cook pieces of meat until the inside temperature reaches 74°C (165°F)
- cook eggs to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F)

Be aware of the risks associated with consuming eggs raw or partially cooked (runny yolk), or using raw eggs in foods that will not be cooked, baked or heat-treated in other ways.

Follow general safe food handling practices:

- keep raw meat and eggs separate from other food products to avoid cross contamination
- wash your hands often, including before and after handling raw meat or eggs
- thoroughly clean contaminated tools and work surfaces with hot, soapy water, then use a household disinfectant or a bleach solution (5 teaspoons of bleach to 8 cups of water)

If you think you have been exposed to AI or if you become ill after handling birds, see your health care provider. Be sure to inform your health care provider that you have been in contact with birds.

If you see sick or dead wild birds, contact your local conservation officer or the Canadian Wildlife Cooperative at 1-800-567-2033.

For more information, please visit inspection.gc.ca/ai