

How to prepare for when your free-range birds can be let outside again

Bird flu (Avian Influenza) is spread between birds through direct contact or indirectly via faeces, droppings or contaminated objects, land or water. If poultry, such as chickens or turkeys, are infected with bird flu they will likely show signs of illness, whereas waterfowl such as ducks and geese can carry it without becoming ill, and therefore can easily spread it to other birds.

The increased risk of bird flu is likely to persist in the UK for several weeks or possibly months, but there are a number of actions that you can take to help protect your birds.

Actions you need to take to protect your birds

Make the range (the outdoor area birds have access to) unattractive to wild birds, particularly wild waterfowl, corvids (e.g. crows and magpies) or gulls

- **Net or cover ponds** – you must net or cover any ponds that are within the fenced range area. You should also consider netting ponds or larger bodies of water within 100m of the perimeter of the outdoor area if within your premises. If this is not possible you should take steps to deter birds from accessing them.
- **Fence off ponds, streams, standing water or wet or boggy areas** – whilst the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone measures is in place, poultry must not be allowed access to areas around ponds, streams, canals or other wet areas as there is a much greater risk that these areas have been contaminated by the droppings of wild birds.
- **Remove any wild bird feed sources** – check the range and surrounding areas for any feed sources that might attract wild birds: these are most likely to be associated with wet areas but also include spilt grain, seeds and uncovered feed bins. All feeding must be undertaken under cover.

Keep wild birds off the range

There are several ways that you can deter wild birds (in particular gulls and wild waterfowl) from landing on and feeding on the range. These include regularly walking the area, using predator decoys and using wild bird visual bird scarer or other novel bird scaring devices (for example, light lasers).

Bird scarers can annoy and disturb the public so please use them in a considerate way. Good Practice Guidance can be found in the [NFU Code of Practice](#).

Decontaminate and sanitise the range

Where the range has not been used for several months it may have been contaminated by wild bird faecal matter. This is particularly important if you are changing the area accessed by free ranging birds. For example, when moving mobile arks or fencing off areas not previously used for poultry.

The virus that causes avian influenza can still be infective in faeces or droppings and other contaminated material for around 50 days (longer in wet conditions or in standing water). If wild birds have had access to your ranges and other outdoor areas, you must take steps to reduce the levels of contamination.

You could:

- **Cleanse and disinfect concrete and other impermeable areas** – use a [government- approved disinfectant](#) at the recommended dilution rate for Diseases of Poultry Order. Appropriate pollution prevention measures must be followed (see section below).
- **Decontaminate the range** – it may be possible to reduce the level of the virus present in heavily contaminated areas by exposing surface to sunlight and drying. This could be done by harrowing or raking the range to break any build-up of faeces followed by the use of some [government-approved disinfectants](#) at the recommended dilution rate. Many approved disinfectants will quickly become inactivated when sprayed on organic material (such as soil) so are unlikely to be effective. You should consult the manufacturer for advice on whether the product you want to use is likely to be effective and follow appropriate pollution prevention measures.
- **Add shavings or woodchip** – the resin in shavings and woodchips has some virucidal properties and may help reduce the virus load in wet areas. You should consult your private vet before considering this option as warm wet conditions can result in an increased risk of *aspergillosis* – a fungal disease that affects the respiratory tract of birds.
- **Drain wet patches and areas of standing water** – In the longer term and subject to obtaining the necessary consents and agreements, consider whether it is possible to fill in or drain any permanent ponds or areas of standing water. Consult the relevant authorities before undertaking any permanent works that

might impact on biodiversity.

Reduce spread by people or objects

Limit the number of people who have access to the range and ensure that they have no contact with any other poultry or birds.

If people have to enter the range, ensure they have dedicated footwear and outer clothing. For sites with over 50 birds, foot dips must be used on entry and exit to houses and outdoor areas/range where the birds are kept. Remember to change or disinfect your footwear when accessing houses from the range. This includes the use of footpaths and signage at the entry and exit to ranges where footpaths cross these areas.

Disinfectants: pollution prevention and control

You do not need to get prior approval from the Environment Agency in England, Scottish Environment Protection Agency in Scotland, or Natural Resources Wales in Wales before applying any disinfectants to concrete areas or the range area provided the volume and concentration of disinfectant applied is similar to that applied in routine cleansing and disinfection operations.

Appropriate pollution prevention measures must be followed in all cases to stop excessive uncontrolled disinfectant run off. Disinfectants must not be applied close to drinking water supplies or surface water bodies.

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