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# Avian Influenza Update

25<sup>th</sup> September 2024

**National Disease Control Centre**

**Number 1 of 2024**

## Avian influenza (AI) situation in Ireland

- There have been no outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in poultry in Ireland during 2023 or 2024 (to date).
- The most recent case of confirmed HPAI in poultry in Ireland was in November 2022
- Farmers and veterinary practitioners and other relevant stakeholders should continue to remain vigilant for any signs of disease in their flocks and report any disease suspicion to their nearest [Regional Veterinary Office \(RVO\)](#).
- Flock owners should ensure high biosecurity standards are maintained to help protect flocks against all poultry diseases, not just HPAI (biosecurity advice below).
- Wintertime brings with it a higher risk period for avian influenza in Ireland. Colder weather and decreasing daylight can extend the survival time of avian influenza viruses in the environment, and migratory wild birds (the natural hosts of many avian influenza viruses) arrive in large numbers to overwinter in Ireland.

## Risk to Ireland regarding HPAI

- Avian Influenza is **highly contagious** for birds.
- **Poultry owners and those working with poultry should beware of visiting areas, both at home and abroad, where deaths of wild birds have occurred (coastal areas, bird colonies, etc.).** Direct contact with sick or dead wild birds must be avoided.
- Members of the public are reminded not to touch sick or dead wild birds. Dogs should be kept on a lead when walking in areas where sick or dead wild birds are present.

## Avian influenza situation in wild birds in Ireland

- In 2024 to date, no wild birds have tested positive for HPAI.
- The most recent case of avian influenza in a wild bird in Ireland was on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023, when H5N1 was recorded in a peregrin falcon.

## Avian influenza situation in Northern Ireland

- There have been no outbreaks of HPAI in poultry in Northern Ireland during 2023 or 2024 (to date).
- On 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024 avian influenza virus was reported in a swan submitted for official testing as part of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) avian influenza wild bird surveillance.

## Current avian influenza situation in poultry in Europe

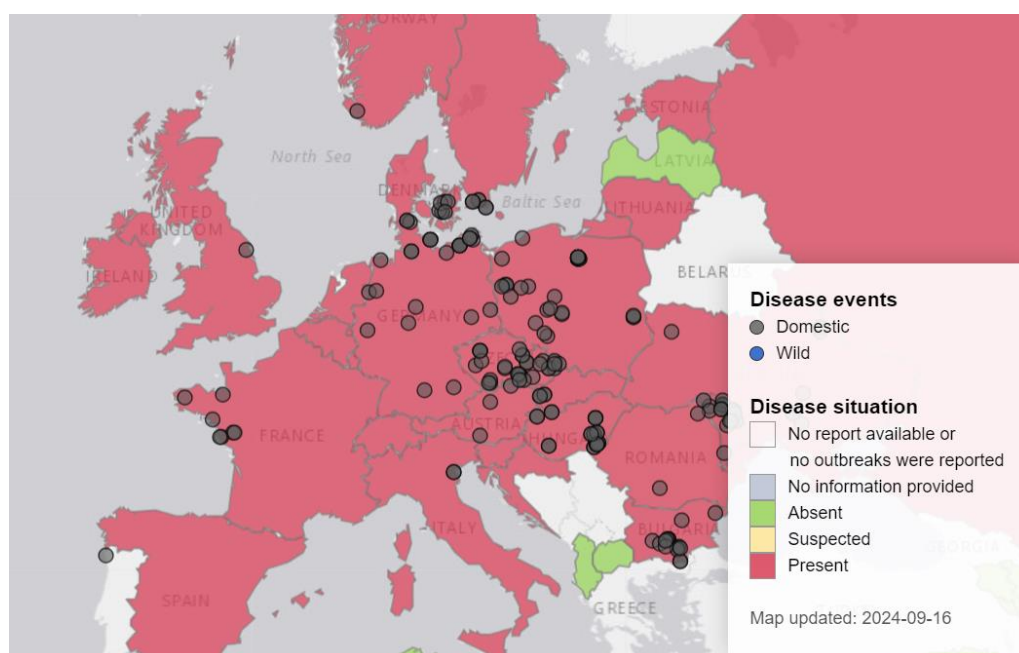
Since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024, 160 outbreaks of HPAI in poultry have been reported to the European Commission's Animal Disease Information System (ADIS). The 160 outbreaks can be broken down by country as follows: Hungary (15), Germany (15), Bulgaria (16), France (7), Italy (1), Denmark (8), Romania (1), Poland (26), Croatia (1), Czech Republic (6), Norway (1), Moldova (55), Slovakia (5), Sweden (3). The most recent case of confirmed HPAI in poultry in Great Britain was on 14 February

2024. There were 506 cases of HPAI virus detected in wild and captive birds in Europe (excluding GB) in 2024 (to date).

The recently published European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) scientific report 'Avian influenza overview March–June 2024' reports that the overall number of detections of HPAI viruses has not been this low since the 2019-2020 epidemiological year [Avian influenza overview March–June 2024 \(wiley.com\)](#). Among the possible reasons for this change include:

- Flock immunity acquired by certain wild bird species, reducing onward disease spread
- Depletion of some wild bird populations
- Reduced viral contamination of the environment
- Changing composition of circulating HPAI virus genotypes

*Figure 1 Geographical locations of Avian Influenza outbreaks in poultry in Europe (01/01/24-18/09/24)*

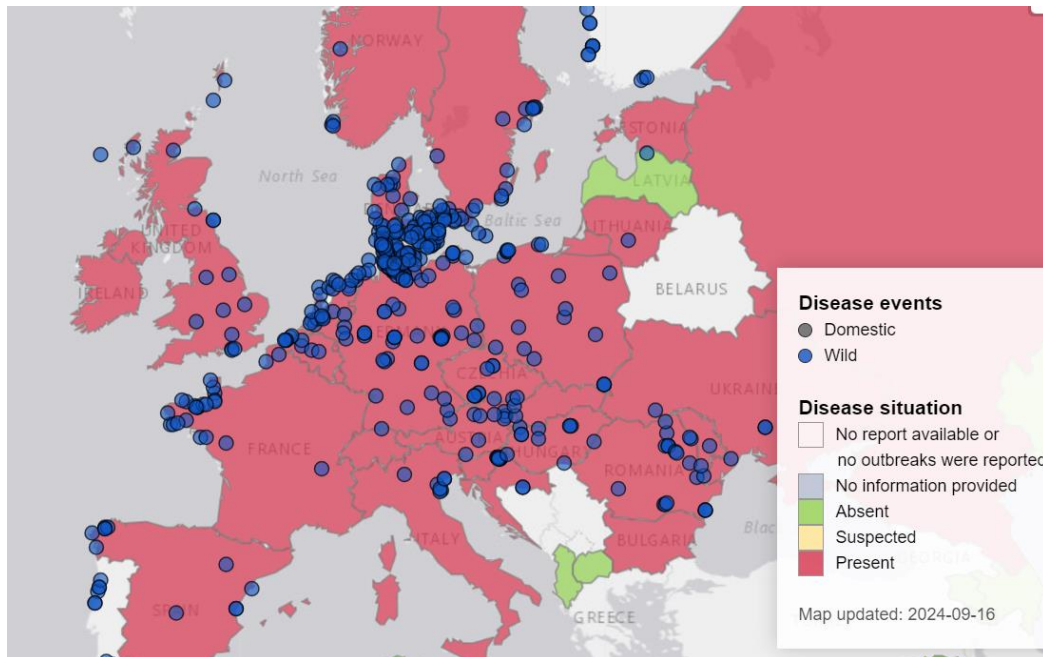


Source EFSA interactive map available [here](#)

## Current avian influenza wild bird situation in the rest of Europe

- Across Europe, numbers of wild birds reported as infected with HPAI has not been as low since the 2020/2021 season.
- Gull species are the predominant species affected.
- In Great Britain, there have been no cases of dead wild birds confirmed as infected with HPAI since the beginning of May 2024. Earlier in 2024, cases of HPAI H5N1 were detected in England. There have also been cases of HPAI H5N5 in wild birds, all seabirds in northern areas; on remote islands north or north-west of mainland Scotland. [Bird flu \(avian influenza\): latest situation in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Figure 2 Locations of Avian Influenza cases in wild birds in Europe in 2024 (01/01/24-18/09/24)

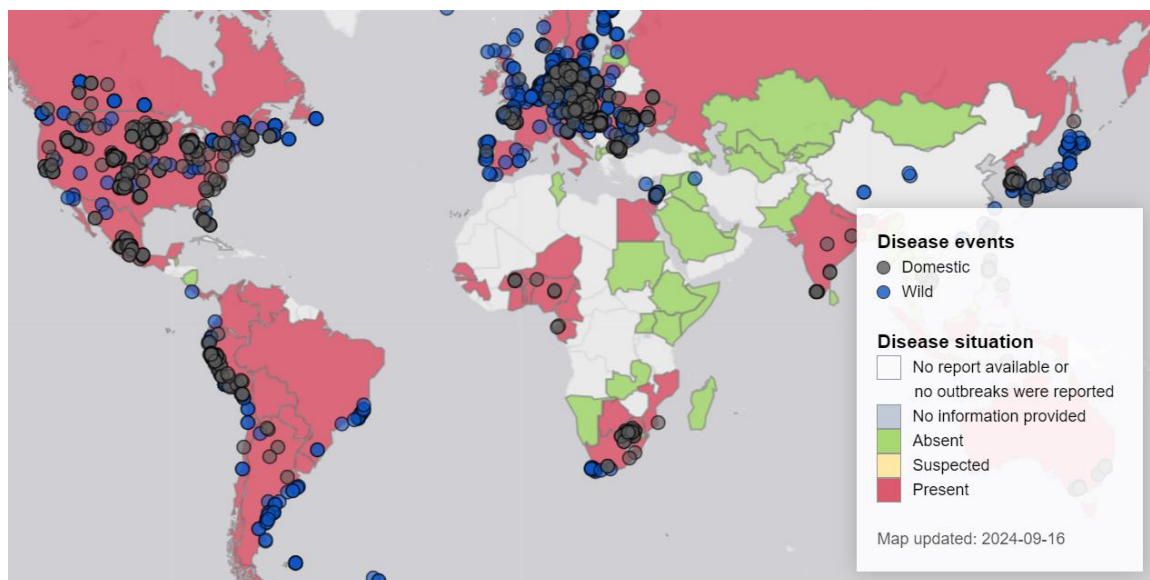


Source EFSA interactive map available [here](#)

### Current global HPAI situation

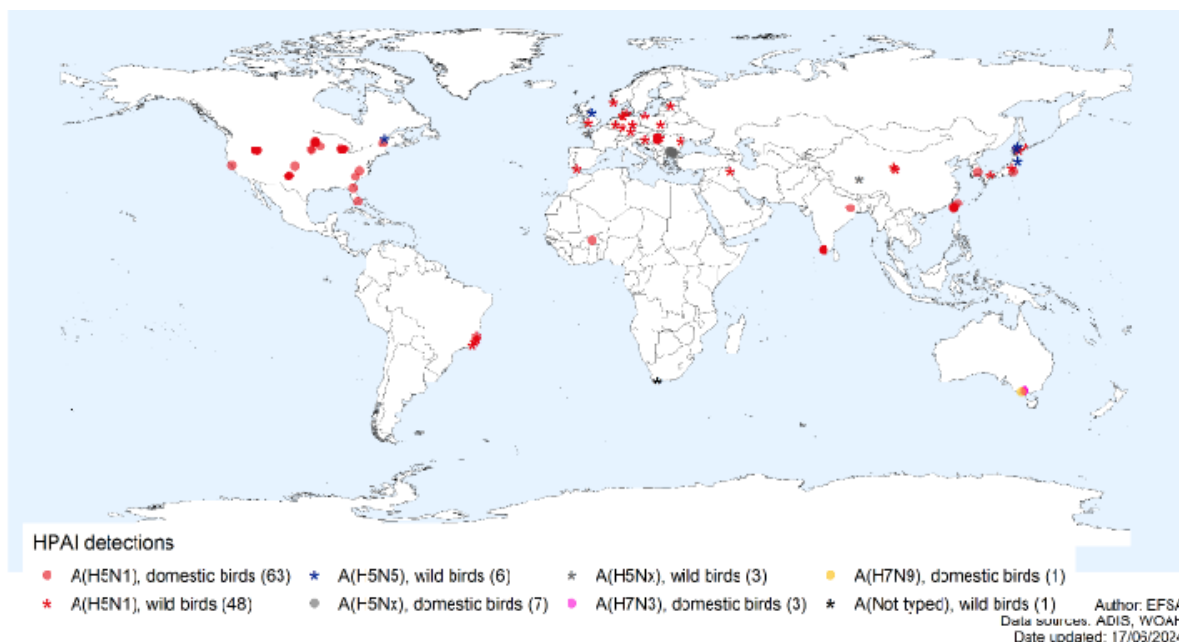
HPAI continues to be reported in poultry and wild birds globally across several continents.

Figure 3 detailing the global distribution of Avian Influenza outbreaks in wild and domestic birds in 2024.



Source EFSA interactive map available [here](#)

Figure 4 detailing the distribution and types of HPAI virus detections reported worldwide in domestic (74) and wild (58) birds by virus type, from 16/03/24-14/06/24.



Source: EFSA scientific report 'Avian influenza overview March–June 2024' available [here](#)

## **Strict Biosecurity is Essential to Prevent Outbreaks**

All flock owners should ask themselves the following questions to help implement and maintain appropriate biosecurity measures:

### **1. Who has access to the poultry areas?**

Only allow **essential** persons access to the poultry houses e.g. husbandry, veterinary care. Ensure that dedicated clothing or disposable personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn including disposable gloves and overalls. Clean and disinfect boots before entering and immediately upon exiting each poultry house. Wash hands each time upon leaving a poultry house. Dedicated personnel should be appointed to manage each site.

### **2. Have I checked the disinfectant points?**

All disinfectant points must be maintained. **Read the label on the disinfectant which is approved for use against avian influenza.** Disinfectant footbaths must be changed regularly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Contamination prevents the effective use of disinfectants. Footwear needs to be cleaned thoroughly before being disinfected in foot dips. Wait the recommended contact time before entering the house. Repeat checks with disinfectant points at entry and exit points to the premises.

### **3. Can wild birds get access to the poultry?**

Inspect the housing thoroughly. **Ensure that there are no gaps where wild birds can enter the housing.** Check the gutters and roof. Can contaminated rainwater enter the house? Can wild birds get access to or contaminate the drinking water system?

**4. Is the feed and bedding stored securely?**

Feed and bedding attract wild birds so **secure storage** of both is essential. If using straw, ensure it is either double wrapped and covered with a birdproof cover or stored in a shed with no wild bird access. Remove wrapping outside of the house. Feed should be stored in a secure bin and any spills cleaned up immediately. Use wild bird deterrents.

**5. What do I do about feed delivery/egg collection vehicles that have to come onto the holding?**

Disinfect wheels, wheel arches and underbody of all vehicles coming before allowing them to enter the premises and prior to leaving the premises. **Do not allow any drivers to enter poultry houses.** Ensure that drivers wear disposable gloves and disinfect footwear upon arrival (ensure that there is a disinfectant point near the feed bin/egg storage area).

**6. What about equipment?**

**Any equipment that is used to transport poultry or poultry products must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to being used on the farm** e.g., trolleys, trays, pallets, cages etc. Disposable single-use egg trays or plastic Keyes trays which are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each use can be used for egg collections. Don't forget about other equipment such as feeders and watering equipment and clean and disinfect equipment and housing between bird placements.

**\*BE VIGILANT\***

**Check the feed and water intake and look for clinical signs of avian influenza.**

**Report any suspicions immediately to DAFM**

**Do not allow anyone on/off the premises pending investigation**

**Reporting of Sick or dead wild birds to DAFM:**

DAFM implements avian influenza surveillance measures in wild birds and poultry throughout the year. The submission and testing of dead wild birds which are on the target species list for avian influenza surveillance is a key part of this programme.

Where the Department has sufficient epidemiological surveillance information in particular geographical areas, it will not necessarily collect dead birds for testing. When dead wild birds are not required for surveillance purposes, and are present on public land, it is the responsibility of the local authority to safely dispose of the carcasses.

Current protocols provide for the collection and sampling of dead wild birds in the following circumstances when required: if one or more bird of prey (including owls), three or more waterfowl (including gulls), five or more of any other species of bird are found

**Sick or dead wild birds can be reported to DAFM via:**

→ Avian Check Wild Bird App <https://aviancheck.apps.services.agriculture.gov.ie/>

→ local [Regional Veterinary Office \(RVO\)](#) or contact the DAFM disease hotline on 01 492 8026 (outside office hours).

## What can poultry owners do to reduce the risk of avian influenza?

Flock owners should remain vigilant for any **unexplained signs of disease in their flocks**, and report any disease suspicion to their nearest Regional Veterinary Office without delay.

### **1. BE VIGILANT**

Monitor your birds carefully for any clinical signs of disease. If in doubt, contact your veterinary practitioner for advice and report any suspect cases promptly.

#### **Signs of Avian Influenza may include:**

- Death/high mortalities in a flock
- Depression/lethargy
- Loss of appetite
- Respiratory distress (gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling)
- Swelling and blue discolouration of combs, wattles, neck and throat
- Gastrointestinal signs (inappetence, diarrhoea)
- Nervous signs
- Reduced egg production or no egg production

### **2. BIOSECURITY**

A copy of the Avian Influenza (Biosecurity measures) Regulations 2022, accompanying guidance document and additional species specific biosecurity leaflets can be found [here](#).

#### **Personnel and Visitors**

- Wear disposable or dedicated outer clothing, boots that can be disinfected, disposable gloves and wash hands after contact with poultry.
- Only allow essential personnel access to your birds.

#### **Buildings and Equipment**

- Regularly clean and disinfect hard surfaces such as paths and walkways.
- Provide clean boot washing and disinfection facilities at all entrances/exits and ensure that people use them. **\*Use a registered disinfectant against avian influenza in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, available to view [here](#).**
- Clean and disinfect any vehicles or equipment that encounter the birds after use.
- Have suitable pest control in place.

#### **Wild Birds**

- Feed and water birds inside or at least under cover.
- Clean up any waste feed in outdoor areas frequently.
- Use netting or wild bird decoys or deterrents to keep wild birds away from poultry areas.

## Management

- Keep ducks and geese separate to other poultry species.
- **The Department also reminds all poultry owners, including those who keep only 1 or 2 birds, of their legal obligation to register their premises with the Department. Registration is a legal requirement under Irish law. Legislation on registration can be found [here](#).**

## Further information regarding Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1

- HPAI H5N1 is a notifiable disease both in Ireland and to the European Commission and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, founded as the OIE)
- Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in poultry in Ireland impact upon our international trade in poultry and poultry products. The disease is highly contagious for birds, but risk of transmission to humans is considered very low. DAFM conduct surveillance for avian influenza.
- Avian influenza poses no food safety risk for consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs are safe to eat.

## Interactive maps for Avian Influenza:

### Europe/Global:

An interactive map for European and global cases (for illustrative purposes) courtesy of EFSA is available to view [here](#)

## Please consult the following resources for further information on AI:

- DAFM has a wide variety of biosecurity resources for avian influenza-please see: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e230-poultry/>
- DAFM avian influenza updates: [gov.ie - Avian influenza \(bird flu\) \(www.gov.ie\)](#)
- To register a poultry flock: [gov.ie - Poultry Register \(www.gov.ie\)](#)
- Regional Veterinary Office contact details: [gov.ie - Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine \(www.gov.ie\)](#)
- European Commission [Avian influenza \(europa.eu\)](#)
- World Organisation for Animal Health: [Avian Influenza - WOAHA - World Organisation for Animal Health](#)
- European Food Safety Authority: [Avian influenza | EFSA \(europa.eu\)](#)

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