

## **Avian Influenza – Government (Defra, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, DAERA (NI)) and APHA processes in place following identification of a positive case in any UK zoo/aquarium**

This season (2021/22) has seen the worst outbreak of avian influenza (AI) in the UK and Ireland to date. There are increasing signs that outbreaks are likely to become annual events in coming years.

With that in mind, zoos and aquariums should continue to maintain the highest possible biosecurity standards and vigilance all year-round. This is particularly important between autumn and spring, when the risk of infection from wild birds is at its highest. Taking active measures to minimise contact with wild birds, observing birds for clinical signs of disease, and seeking prompt advice from a vet are crucial. Ensuring all bird-keeping staff are signed up for alerts from the relevant national authorities, and are familiar with the biosecurity guidance and information (see links at the end of this document).

The following information has been provided by government officials in order to ensure UK zoos and aquariums are well prepared and informed in the event of a positive AI case on site.

### What happens if highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is confirmed on an avian holding?

If a suspect case is reported to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), a local APHA vet will investigate in the first instance. The premises will be placed under official restrictions and if they cannot negate disease by assessing the clinical picture on the premises, then sampling will be undertaken. Between sampling and the results, the investigating staff will work with the veterinary advisers in APHA's Field Epidemiology Team to create a report. Where HPAI is confirmed within a holding that contains poultry or captive birds, the default position is that all birds will be humanely culled. Policy colleagues from the relevant administration will be involved to discuss further case particulars. A similar approach will be taken if the zoo/aquarium is in NI although the investigation will be carried out by DAERA officials.

### What happens if HPAI is confirmed within a zoo/aquarium?

Zoological collections are dealt with in a slightly different manner compared to standard commercial avian holdings. The first step is the same, the whole site will be placed under formal restrictions and an epidemiological assessment of the whole site will be undertaken. Unless there are clearly defined areas of the site where there are no kept birds the entirety of the zoo/aquarium must be closed to the public while decisions are made on the likely extent and risk of forward spread from the site.

This assessment will be carried out by an APHA vet, who will work with the Field Epi Team, in conjunction with zoo/aquarium staff. The intention will be to undertake this assessment as quickly as possible. Based on this assessment the intention will be to limit the geographical area considered to be the infected premises (IP) as much as possible, based on the epidemiological separation from the positive case.

The separation of groups is not based on simple geography, but a combination of the epidemiological links (e.g. shared staff and equipment) and the mitigations already in place to reduce the likelihood of disease spread. All enclosures that are epidemiologically linked to a positive case, e.g. opportunities for beak-to-beak contact between aviaries, enclosures connected by water

bodies, and enclosures that share staff or equipment without adequate cleansing and disinfection between use, will be considered as part of the IP.

In order to facilitate swift decision-making and to limit the length of time that the zoo or areas of the zoo are closed to the public, zoos should aim to have the necessary information at hand in advance. Information such as a full inventory of birds and porcines, all movements of birds on and off the premises, mortality records, details of biosecurity and whether each group has dedicated keepers (please include volunteers) and details such as water sources and flow of water on the site.

As a general rule within the designated IP, all birds within the affected group/exhibit will be humanely culled.

The above process coupled with a broader geographic/demographic risk assessment will inform a decision over whether the case is likely to be limited and can be considered a 'Captive Bird Case', or whether Surveillance (usually 10 km) and Protection Zones (usually 3 km) need to be implemented around the infected premises, which will help reduce any risks to any nearby poultry or other flocks.

Once the above assessment is complete and there is a better understanding of the zoo epidemiological set up, it might be possible to limit the initial public closure to a specific unit/area. The key is providing assurances and confidence to government officials that appropriate measures are in place and these are monitored and adhered to.

#### What if a positive case is within/near to conservation status species?

If there are threatened bird species in the vicinity of the positive case, government officials will take their conservation status into account, alongside the scale and size of the zoo/aquarium site, when considering necessary culling.

Unless a group of birds has been vaccinated (only available in England), government is legally obliged to undertake a stamping out policy. However, there are certain derogations available for rare, endangered or birds of particular conservation value where it can be shown that this would not adversely affect animal or public health and where birds can be isolated from both wild birds and other kept birds. Decisions on whether particular birds may be spared are based on the following set of principles:

- For species of conservation concern within the same epidemiological unit as a positive case, all species vulnerable or more threatened on the [IUCN Red List](#) are considered in scope for sparing from culling. Those listed as Near Threatened or of Lower Conservation status, are likely to be humanely culled.
- For domestic poultry species (and for other diseases such as FMD or ASF where a stamping out policy is pursued) to be considered pedigree or pure bred that are true to type, they will need to be on the UK Genetics for Livestock and Equines (UKGLE) Committee (formerly the Farm Animal Genetic Resources (FAnGR) Breeds at Risk Register
- Additional conservation/rarity status can be considered in special cases, e.g. birds which are part of recognised breeding programmes/intended for release programmes/special genetic value etc. These are managed on a case-by-case basis and involve advice from a National Expert Group (NEG), who will evaluate evidence.

- Issues that are not considered as reasons to derogate from culling. These include financial value, educational or awareness value of birds, or time spent training birds.

**The zoo should be able to provide an up-to-date list of birds that fall into above categories, the number of birds per cage, and the difficulty and welfare implications of catching them for sampling. This information needs to be presented to APHA at short notice to speed up the assessment and reduce the response time.**

For conservation status birds/animals from within the same epidemiological unit as a positive case, next steps will be assessed on a case-by-case basis but are likely to include:

- 1) PCR testing. Upon negative result, these birds will then be moved to an isolation pen (ideally within the same enclosure).
- 2) Further PCR testing immediately following the move and repeated after 21 days.
- 3) If all the above PCR tests return a negative result then the birds are now considered clear.
- 4) If any bird tests positive the default position is that bird will need to be culled and testing will need to be repeated for all other birds in the same epi group as a negative test will mean that the testing will need to be re-set.
- 5) Cleansing and disinfection – Following preliminary cleansing and disinfection (C & D) by APHA, the site owner is responsible for secondary C & D. There are three options for secondary C & D.

Any birds in the surrounding area will also require surveillance. The degree of surveillance will depend on the species of birds and animals involved, and statistical or environmental sampling may be possible across the site, rather than sampling of all individuals. This will be decided by officials during the site risk assessment.

If you have any queries or concerns, don't hesitate to contact the [BIAZA Office](#).

#### Biosecurity guidance and information of the latest AI situation

- England: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu>
- Scotland: [www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza](http://www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza)
- Wales: <https://gov.wales/avian-influenza-bird-flu>
- Northern Ireland: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/avian-influenza-ai>
- Ireland: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/50ce4-avian-influenza-bird-flu/>