

2023-24 Season MUST KNOWS of Avian Influenza

2023-24 SEASONAL MUST-DOS

- Make sure guests are prepared for disruption to planned voyage activities due to HPAI before they leave home.
- Read the 2023-24 Biosecurity Instructions
- Ensure biosecurity procedures are carried out to the highest level.
 - Decontamination procedures must be carried out between regions.
 - Onboard the vessels, it is imperative that all organic material is removed from boots and other equipment before Virkon S (or equivalent) is applied.
 - Virkon S must be allowed to dry to be effective.
- A Pre-Landing Assessment **MUST** be carried out prior to any landing.
- 5 meters/15 feet distance must be maintained from Antarctic Wildlife
- Do not lie down, kneel/crouch, or sit at sites with wildlife.
- Never pick up/handle dead wildlife.
- Do take photos or videos to record what you saw to support further investigations.
- Do take note of the location(s).
- Do report as suspected cases to your EL, IAATO, and home office immediately.
- Operators must create specific standard operating procedures (SOPs) for scientists they are working with, especially scientists who work with RPAS. Operators are responsible for sharing their internal SOPs with appropriate personnel.
- **WHEN IN DOUBT DO NOT LAND**

What is Avian Influenza?

- A viral infection (sickness caused by a virus) that is highly contagious among birds.
- The virus has been around globally a long time, since at least the early 1960s, found in domestic poultry and many different types of wild birds.
- The virus has evolved over time to include a range of types of Avian Influenza
 - Low Pathogenic (causing no disease in wild birds: all HA subtypes): many Antarctic birds species are known hosts for this type of virus and it does not cause concern.
 - **High Pathogenic (associated with disease and death in poultry and wild birds: only the H5 and H7 subtypes): specifically, the Clade 2.3.4.4b (commonly referred to as HPAI H5N1) is a concern regarding Antarctic species.**
 - **The virus can also infect some mammals, including pinnipeds and cetaceans.**
- To date, HPAI H5N1 has spread globally very rapidly but has not been found in the Antarctic Treaty Area. There is now a heightened risk that it will arrive there through natural migration of wild bird species this austral summer season 2023/24. The Antarctic bird groups considered most vulnerable are the gulls and skuas. Fur seals are considered the most vulnerable Antarctic mammal species.

HPAI H5N1

- “HP” or “Highly Pathogenic” means it makes infected birds [and some infected mammals] sick and causes mass mortality events where many infected animals die.
- Direct contact is also believed to be a mechanism of transmission and may be important in the spread of HPAI, in addition to the transmission through respiratory droplets.
- An infected bird usually [but not always] displays visible signs of the infection, such as nervousness, tremors, lack of coordination, lack of movement or odd movements, coughing/gasping for air, and swelling or redness around the eyes, neck, and head.
- Multiple dead animals in one area may be an indication that the virus is present.
- Avian flu is a globally reportable disease, so there will be national protocols for reporting any confirmed avian flu cases in Antarctica.



What is the risk to humans?

- Recently, there have been increasing reports of outbreaks among mammals, with sporadic detection in humans reported but remaining very rare. To date, human-to-human transfer has never been detected.
- The human cases thus far are mostly linked to close contact with infected birds, or from their carcasses, body fluids or feces, and from virus contaminated environments¹. Infections in humans can cause severe disease with a high mortality rate.