

# 2024–2025 Biosecurity Instructions

For IAATO Office Representatives, Expedition Leaders,  
Field Staff, Vessel Masters and Officers

## Emergency Contact Information

IAATO Emergency Line (Monitored 24hours):	+1 401 608 2090
Incident Reporting (non-Emergency):	operations@iaato.org shipscheduler@iaato.org

## Key IAATO Contact Information for the 2024-25 Season:

Ship Scheduler Assistance:	shipscheduler@iaato.org
Online Assessment questions and feedback:	operations@iaato.org
FOM Sync App or Polar Guide App feedback:	operations@iaato.org
Concerning wildlife behaviour:	operations@iaato.org

## 2024-25 SEASONAL MUST DOS OF AVIAN INFLUENZA AND OTHER WILDLIFE DISEASES

- Make sure guests are prepared for disruption to planned voyage activities due to HPAI before they leave home.
- Read the 2024-25 IAATO HPAI Handbook and Biosecurity Instructions
- Ensure biosecurity procedures are carried out to the highest level.
  - Decontamination procedures must be carried out daily and 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.
  - It is best practice to decontaminate footwear with Virkon® S before and after every landing.
  - Answers to commonly asked questions and best practices from the field have been consolidated into two new documents: *Biosecurity Disinfection FAQs* and *Biosecurity Disinfection: Recommendations and Best Practices*.
- A Pre-Landing Assessment **MUST** be carried out prior to any landing.
- 5 metres/15 feet distance **MUST** be maintained from wildlife.
- **DO NOT** lie down, kneel/crouch, squat, or sit on the ground at sites with wildlife.
- **DO NOT** use stools or chairs or leave tripods unattended in wildlife areas.
- **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.**

## Overarching Biosecurity Obligations (FOM Section 07 Biosecurity Operational Procedures)

IAATO's mandatory biosecurity and wildlife watching procedures are a recognised cornerstone of our commitment to safe, environmentally responsible travel. We remind you of the biosecurity obligations laid out in the IAATO Field Operations Manual (FOM) Section 07.

In addition, for the 2024-25 season, you are required to follow special procedures to mitigate the introduction and spread of avian influenza and other wildlife diseases:

### 1. Avian influenza (HPAI) and other wildlife diseases

Since 2021, the increasing intensity of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 and other wildlife disease outbreaks has resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of seabirds around the world. Marine mammals, including seals and sea lions, have also been affected. At the time of writing, over 500,000 seabirds and over 20,000 sealions have died from HPAI in Chile and Peru alone and the disease has been confirmed in Tierra del Fuego. It is highly likely that it will arrive via animals migrating to and from the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic with serious implications for wildlife.



*Great Skua killed by HPAI, RSPB Scotland*

The SCAR Antarctic Wildlife Health Network (AWHN) has advised that there is a high risk that HPAI will re-emerge in Antarctic and sub-Antarctic regions during the 2024-25 austral summers.

Assume HPAI and other wildlife diseases will arrive and maintain the highest biosecurity possible.

Be prepared for the closure of visitor sites and/or regions for extended periods.

### NEW: 2024-25 IAATO HPAI (Avian Influenza) Handbook

There are several places where supporting information and resources around HPAI and other wildlife diseases protocols can be found. Please visit the areas listed below for videos and documentation to support mindful avian influenza operations to lessen risk.

- IAATO.org Field Staff Resources
- FOM Section 02 Seasonal Information
- FOM Section 07 Biosecurity Operational Procedures
- Supplementary video in FOM Section 06 Briefings (Web Only)

**Special note for the 2024-25 season: Due to COVID, HPAI, and other wildlife diseases, IAATO Vessels will not interact with occupied National Antarctic Program Stations for tourism visits, unless it is for previously authorized visits, authorized logistical assistance or special projects. Any changes to policies will be announced to as information becomes available.**



## 2. Non-native species transmission

Introduction of non-native species is one of the highest priority concerns in Antarctica due to increased human activity, coupled with a potentially more hospitable environment caused by warming, particularly in the Peninsula region.

**Research indicates that field staff, along with scientists and science support personnel, are more likely to transport non-native species than tourists. It is believed that this is due to field staff and scientists using the same clothing and gear in other areas of the world. Please make sure you CLEAN YOUR OWN GEAR and try to have Antarctic-specific gear so you do not have to clean after each non-Antarctic landing or port call. The study found that camera bags and backpacks were the primary source of transmittal. Remember: Take it new or take it clean.**

- i. We remind operators to follow biosecurity procedures and to include the vacuuming of clothing prior to landing in the Antarctic
  - Remember that in addition to the first thorough biosecurity cleaning before arriving in Antarctica, comprehensive cleaning should also take place between distinct regions (e.g., between Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) and South Georgia; between South Georgia and Antarctica; Antarctic Peninsula and The Ross Sea).
  - Remember to remove pet hair, rocks and pebbles (which could be seeds, or trapping seeds), and any other material foreign to Antarctica.
- ii. The Biosecurity Declaration in the updated *IAATO Boot, Clothing and Equipment Decontamination Procedures* for Marine Operations should be completed in each region, by everyone going ashore, including all passengers, staff, and crew.
- iii. Deep Field and Air Operators are strongly recommended to have their crew and staff sign a declaration similar to that given in *IAATO Biosecurity Procedures for Deep Field and Air Operators*.
- iv. Care should be taken to decontaminate boots, clothing, hiking poles, tripods, bags, etc., **before and after each landing** to mitigate any potential introduction of non-native species or cross contamination including microbes present on ship floors. Boot-washing stations should be located at the head of the gangway or close to where passengers embark and disembark the vessel.  
  
Where aircraft are used, similar procedures should be in place.
- v. COMNAP has developed a checklist for providers to help ensure activities are 'bug-free' (FOM Section 07 Biosecurity Operational Procedures). COMNAP have also prepared a training module on non-native species. Alongside the checklist these are particularly useful for air/land operators. There are also additional guidelines for the cleaning of vehicles. This is intended for any operators taking ATVs, skidoos, etc., into the field.

### Disinfectants

- i. A suitable biodegradable broad-spectrum disinfectant is recommended such as Virkon® S. It must be allowed to dry on equipment between landings.
- ii. At this time, Virkon® S is considered the best practice in the Antarctic for biocides. IAATO continues to work with manufacturers, scientists, and stakeholders to research alternatives which could be used.
- iii. Answers to commonly asked questions and best practices from the field have been consolidated into two new documents in Section 07 Biosecurity Operational Procedures *Biosecurity Disinfection FAQs* and *Biosecurity Disinfection: Recommendations and Best Practices*.

A poster outlining the IAATO Don't Pack a Pest is available for download, (FOM Section 19 Guideline Posters) and it is mandatory to display these guidelines to clients near boot-washing stations.

The Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) has updated the manual for prevention of the introduction for non-native species. The manual includes references to the various protocols that are in place across the Antarctic community, including IAATO's.

## Best Practices and Lessons Learned in the Field (See also *Biosecurity Disinfection: Recommendations and Best Practices*)

- i. Be sure to check logos on sole and sides of arch of footwear and tight indents where organic debris may be lodged.



- ii. All persons involved in preparing disinfectant solution, biosecurity protocol, and cleaning of embarkation areas must have all skin covered at a minimum and should use eye protection.
- iii. 18.93 L bucket or paint bucket works well for equipment such as walking sticks or flag poles.
- iv. Spray bottles work well for tarps, followed by hanging to air dry.
- v. Items brought to shore to create traction or clean footwear before returning to the vessel must be monitored for any debris shed into the Antarctic environment that must be removed, and thoroughly decontaminated before next use.

## 3. Special Note about South Georgia Biosecurity Inspections (FOM Section 13)

All visitors should note the following when planning a shore excursion:

- i. Boot washing is obligatory for all persons prior to going ashore and again when returning to the ship. Boots must be cleaned to remove dirt and seeds and then dipped in an approved biocide (e.g. Virkon® S).
- ii. Clothing inspections and boot washing must be overseen by a competent member of the expedition team. For visits, this must be either a member of the expedition staff or an appropriate crew member. The Visit Permit holder is responsible for ensuring that this inspection is carried out. All external surfaces of footwear, which will be worn ashore, must be washed.

### Cleaning Tips from the Field:

- To get complete buy in from the guests, start biosecurity briefings and checks early, especially if you are going to different regions, as multiple biosecurity checks and cleaning will have to take place.
- Assign a crew/staff member to be present at the gangway/side-gate to check guests as they depart and return to the ship.
- Especially on South Georgia beaches, have scrub brushes available before guests embark the small boats back to the ship. This will help with the initial cleaning. (If this method is used, be sure that brushes are appropriately cleaned upon return to ship.)
- Have the appropriate tools to assist – large paper clips and hand scrubbing brushes are a must. Pay particular attention to Velcro.





Government Officers may inspect boot washing facilities and procedures on visiting vessels (including yachts) and will inspect visitors, including staff and crew, before they disembark the vessel to ensure biosecurity protocols have been undertaken properly.

The Biosecurity Audit is a check undertaken by Government Officers, on vessels in respect of their compliance with biosecurity procedures, or more specifically the effectiveness of the procedures in place to reduce biosecurity risk.

Government Officers conduct a standardised inspection of clothing, footwear and bags to check for biosecurity risks. A tiered system has been introduced comprising of 'basic' and 'comprehensive' audits.

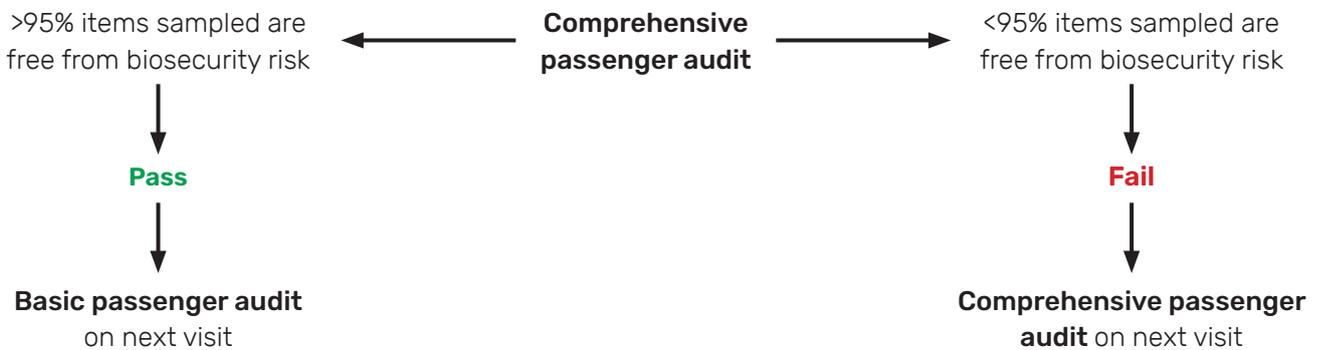
Both types of audits follow the same inspection procedure but for a basic audit the sample sizes and failure thresholds are not intended to be statistically significant, rather they are an early warning sign that a more comprehensive audit is required on the next visit. Therefore, they are scaled by vessel size but not directly proportional.

For a comprehensive audit, a statistically significant sample size will be calculated which will be directly proportional to the number of passengers on board. The failure threshold for a comprehensive audit is below 95%.

At the start of the season, all visiting vessels will have a 'comprehensive' passenger audit. Providing vessels get above 95% success in a comprehensive audit, for subsequent visits they can have a 'basic' audit.

After all audits, feedback will be provided to the vessel (EL or responsible person). If an audit (basic or comprehensive) is failed, the next visit a comprehensive audit will be undertaken. However, there is no specific requirement to come to King Edward Point first.

All vessels should strive to achieve a 100% pass rate, and many achieve this!



# Pax onboard	# Passengers checked	# Items with biosecurity risk that would trigger fail
<12	5	1
13-200	10	2
200+	15	3

