

## Information for Poultry Keepers

### Fowl pest, an epizootic disease

Fowl pest (*Avian Influenza*, known colloquially as “bird flu”) is an acute, highly infectious, feverish viral disease among birds. It can cause considerable economic damage and occurs among chickens, turkeys and numerous bird species living in the wild. Ducks, geese, pigeons and other wild birds are barely susceptible to the disease or show no symptoms, but they can be significant in spreading the virus. Special risk factors for transmission to local poultry are free-range keeping, and thus the contact possibility between domestic and wild birds, enterprises in areas with a high density of birds of passage, the close proximity of an enterprise to places where birds of passage collect (e.g. wetlands, marshes, lakes, rivers), respectively, an enterprise location on migratory routes.

### Transmission from animal to animal

The virus is expelled from the animal in excrement (droppings), saliva and lacrimal fluid, whereby excrement contains a high virus content. Infection takes place directly or through contact with infected material, such as excrement, transport boxes, tools, egg cartons, footwear, clothing and vehicles. Infection through the air is also possible with heavy dust development.

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### Transmission to humans

In principle “bird flue” is transmitted only from animal to animal. Infection of humans by an infected animal is fundamentally possible, but very seldom occurs, and only following very close contact between the animal and humans, such as in Asia where humans and animals live in a confined space together. Through co-infection between fowl pest and the current influenza virus, however, a new virus can be created that is transmitted through human contact with other humans. To hinder such a case, inoculation with the current influenza vaccine is recommended for all persons.

**Due to the current situation (several cases of H5N1 infections among waterfowl in Austrian territory) the following additional measures are currently valid throughout Austria:**

### 1. Report of poultry keeping

All keepers of poultry and other birds must register this keeping of stock at the responsible district-administration office. The necessary form, which is to be filled in and sent to the district-administration office, can be downloaded at [www.ovis.at](http://www.ovis.at). **The required data comprises the name and address of the animal keeper, the LFBIS number (if available) and the type of bird and numbers kept at the time of registration.**

All animals kept must be registered (from one animal); this also applies to zoos, animal homes, hobby keeping, small-stock keeping and keeping for hunting purposes. The keeping of cagebirds, which are kept permanently in closed rooms and are kept without direct or indirect contact to other birds, as well as enterprises already registered.

### 2. Regulations for the keeping of poultry:

- **Obligation for keeping in coops or enclosed keeping facilities:** all birds kept as domestic animals – including those owned by hobby keepers – are to be kept immediately and permanently in coops. Those keepers with no coop available must ensure the availability of an enclosed keeping facility, which hinders contact to wild birds and their excrement (droppings).  
In individual, justified cases, the official veterinary surgeon can authorise exceptions, e.g. ostrich keeping for animal-protection reasons. Nevertheless, in such a case diverse examinations at cost to the animal keeper are to be undertaken.
- **Separation of ducks and geese from other poultry**

### 3. Prohibition of animal exhibitions and other events

For the time being events at which poultry or other bird species are exhibited, exchanged, traded or presented may not be carried out. Because every event at which poultry from differing enterprise sources come together in one place, incorporates the danger of the further spreading of diseases.

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4. Prohibition of hunting wild birds

5. Severe criteria for obligatory registration when an epidemic is suspected

Fowl pest is subject to obligatory reporting conform to the epizootic disease law and fowl-pest regulation. **With the suspicion of fowl pest, the official veterinary surgeon at the responsible district-administration office must be informed.** This veterinary surgeon takes samples from the stock and sends them for clarification to the National Reference Laboratory, the Austrian Agency for Health and Nutritional Safety (AGES), and the Mödling Institute for Veterinary Medical Examinations. A suspicion of an epidemic that is subject to obligatory notification is anyway applicable when the following symptoms are established in the animals:

- **sudden changes in a large number of animals (more than 3% per week)**
- **massive decrease in laying (more than 5% decrease over at least two days)**
- **sudden decrease of water- and feed consumption by more than 20%**
- **respiratory indications**
- **oedema or bleeding of the head, throat, comb or legs**

Obligatory registration is not only applicable to agriculture keepers, but also to small enterprises and hobby keepers!

### Obligatory reporting of dead waterfowl

Please observe: together with the report of the suspicion of an epidemic among one's own poultry, all of those who have found dead waterfowl are to report it immediately, with the details of site location given, to the official veterinary surgeon at the district-administration office.

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**Attention: please avoid contact with diseased or dead fowl, either in your own enterprise or in the wild. Should this be nevertheless necessary, please wear protective clothing (protective coat, head covering that protects your hair, a mouth-nose mask, protective glasses, gloves and boots).**

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**As an animal keeper you can take the following additional measures to make the risk of infection of your poultry as slight as possible:**

- Prevent wild birds from entering the poultry enclosure.
- Store feed so that no wild bird has access to it.
- Change your shoes and clothing before and after entering the coop.
- Use the disinfection bath.
- Exchange no devices, or similar, among various poultry keeping enterprises.
- Allow no unauthorised persons to enter the coops.
- Ensure sufficient hygiene on journeys abroad.
- Take special care when returning from stays abroad in endangered regions in respect of bringing in viruses (e.g. on dirty shoes)
- Regularly clean and disinfect your coops.
- Prevent your children from playing with birds. Certainly prohibit them from touching diseased or dead birds. Ensure that your children wash their hands before eating.
- Your children should inform you immediately if they have found a diseased or dead fowl.

**Excursus: Avian Influenza Inoculation:**

Prophylactic inoculation of fowl stock against the H5N1 virus is currently prohibited in Austria. The reasons given against inoculation in the case of fowl pest occurring in Austria are:

- the effectiveness of the vaccine against only one influenza strain, an infection with another strain can spread under the protection of the vaccine
- the possibility that the excretion of inoculated animals can transmit the virus because it may still be infectious
- lowering of epidemic awareness (lack of hygiene because farmers will possibly rely exclusively on the inoculation)
- costs of vaccines and veterinary surgeon costs
- trade disadvantages: inoculated poultry, and products from inoculated animals, find no buyers or find buyers with great difficulty.

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According to current regulations, a so-called “emergency inoculation” can be undertaken to complement control measures after the outbreak of the epidemic. In the case of a devastating epidemic, the current situation in Austria would have to be re-evaluated and in consideration of the infectiousness of the virus strain, the density of poultry within the enterprise and, not least, the efficiency of the appropriate measures to be undertaken are to be decided. The decision lies with the Federal Ministry for Health and Women, and requires authorisation by the EU.

## **Procedure in a poultry enterprise following an outbreak of an epidemic**

If an outbreak of an epidemic occurs within an enterprise, it will be made subject to official closure and all of the poultry in the epidemic enterprise will be killed and hygienically disposed of. To hinder further spreading of the epidemic to other poultry enterprises, all contact enterprises, respectively, enterprises in the immediate neighbourhood will be examined and – according to risk – all of the animals in this enterprise also killed.

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**Please observe: the affected animal keeper will receive the value of the animals.**

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The contact partner for the animal keeper is the official veterinary surgeon, who then reports of his measures to the local crisis centre of the veterinary department at the provincial government office. Through killing of infected poultry, and carcass disposal, and the products of the infected animal, no poultry meat from diseased animals comes into trade.

## **Measures for the prevention of human infection**

(applies for the case of an epidemic outbreak within an enterprise):

- Animal-keeping areas, in which diseased animals, or animals suspected of disease, are to be found, should be entered only in exceptional cases.
- Before entering the animal-keeping areas, it is essential to put on special clothing and personal protective equipment, which are to be removed before leaving the area and kept in hermetically sealed containers and made subject to a profes-

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sional cleaning/disinfection or disposal, so that no transmission of viruses can take place.

Among this special clothing and personal protective equipment are especially

- body covering working clothes (e.g. overalls, one-way protection suits, as the case may be),
- head covering that completely covers the hair,
- suitable boots for disinfection,
- waterproof protective gloves for disinfection,
- eye protection, e.g. in the form of tight-fitting protective glasses with a side protection.

- After leaving the animal-keeping area, and as the case may be, after removal of the working/protective clothing, the hands are to be disinfected. The special legal epizootic disease regulations are to be observed.
- Furthermore, medical treatment in consultation with a doctor is to be considered (antiviral prophylaxis, inoculation against human influenza viruses (with the currently recommended vaccine), to hinder double infections with human influenza and fowl-pest virus).

**As of:** February 2006

For further information you can contact the **Information Hotline** of the Austrian Agency for Health and Nutritional Safety (AGES) at **050 555 666**.

**Legal reference:**

No claim for completeness is made for this paper and is in no way liable.

Further information is available at [www.ages.at](http://www.ages.at) and at [www.bmgf.gv.at](http://www.bmgf.gv.at), where the Austrian Pandemic Plan and the "Crisis Plan for Classic Fowl Pest and Newcastle Disease 2000" can be downloaded.