

How to Prevent and Detect Disease in Backyard Flocks and Pet Birds

Diseases such as highly pathogenic [avian influenza](#) and velogenic [Newcastle disease](#) can cause serious illness and death in many bird species. Fortunately, you can protect your birds and keep them healthy.

- [Poultry biosecurity](#)
 - [General Producer Guide - National Avian On-Farm Biosecurity Standard](#)
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Follow five basic rules in the day-to-day care of your birds to reduce the risks posed by harmful diseases.

1. Prevent contact with wild birds and other animals

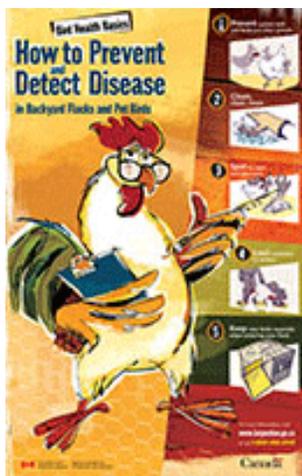
Wild birds and other animals such as mice can carry a range of disease-causing viruses, parasites and bacteria. Make sure that your birds and their food and water are kept away from wild animals. Promptly clean up spilled feed and litter, and keep feed in sealed containers to avoid attracting unwanted guests.

2. Clean, clean and clean

Viruses, parasites and bacteria can live in organic matter such as litter and soil. Eliminate the risk of disease spread by routinely and thoroughly cleaning barns, cages, egg trays, gardening tools, and water and feed containers. No equipment should be shared with or borrowed from other bird owners. Always clean your hands, clothing and footwear before and after handling birds. Promptly dispose of dead birds, litter and unused eggs.



[Watch the Video](#)



[Poster](#)

(PDF - 320 kb)

3. Spot the signs and report early

Bird owners are legally responsible to notify authorities of serious bird diseases such as avian influenza. Call a veterinarian or a [local office of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) if you suspect your birds are sick.

Signs to look for include:

- **lack of energy, movement or appetite;**
- **decreased egg production;**
- **swelling around the head, neck and eyes;**
- **coughing, gasping for air or sneezing;**
- **nervous signs, tremors or lack of coordination;**
- **diarrhea; or**
- **sudden death.**

It is always better to be overcautious. Report any bird that you think may be sick. Early reporting can greatly limit the effect of a disease on the health of your birds.

- [What to expect if your animals may be infected](#)

4. Limit exposure to visitors

People can spread bird diseases, too. As a general rule, do not give visitors access to your birds. If someone must enter your property or handle your birds, make sure that their clothing, hands and footwear are clean and free of debris. Provide shoe or boot covers, or use a foot bath to prevent disease from entering or leaving your property. As well, the tires and wheel wells of any vehicles that have been around birds should be cleaned before entering your property.

5. Keep new birds separate when entering your flock

Avoid introducing disease to your birds. New birds should be segregated and monitored for at least 30 days before entering your existing flock. Make sure that new birds come from reputable suppliers that have strict disease controls in place. Birds returning from shows or exhibits should also be segregated for at least two weeks.