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Avian Influenza Update

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National Disease Control Centre

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Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza: Current Situation in Ireland

- Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) continues to be found in wild birds in Ireland
- Since the last Avian Influenza Update, issued on the 22nd December 2023, cases of HPAI H5N1 in wild birds have been confirmed in counties Cork, Limerick, Roscommon, Tipperary and Westmeath
- No outbreaks of HPAI have been confirmed in poultry or captive birds in Ireland since two outbreaks occurred in Co. Monaghan in November 2022
- Avian Influenza virus can survive in the environment for extended periods especially during colder weather conditions, there remains a significant risk of further outbreaks. Strict biosecurity is essential on all poultry and captive bird holdings
- Contact with wild birds and/or environmental contamination remain the major risk factors of HPAI incursion. Stringent biosecurity is the best defence!
- All poultry and captive bird owners are reminded to review and, where necessary, improve biosecurity procedures on their premises to ensure that all appropriate measures are in place.
- Flock owners should remain vigilant for any signs of disease in their flocks, and report any disease suspicion to their nearest Regional Veterinary Office
- The link for the **Avian Check Wild Bird App** has been updated and can now be found here: <https://aviancheck.apps.services.agriculture.gov.ie/>.

Regulations in force: Housing order and mandatory biosecurity measures

- On the 7th November the **Avian Influenza (Precautionary Confinement of Birds) Regulations 2022** came into force which require flock keepers to confine all poultry and captive birds in their possession or under their control in a secure building. Where this is not possible, they must be secured in a manner that prevents access to other poultry, captive birds or wild birds
- The Regulations and an Avian Influenza (Precautionary Confinement of Birds) Regulations 2022 Frequently Asked Questions document may be found [here](#)
- All flock owners are **legally required to maintain best practice biosecurity measures** to mitigate against the risk of introducing avian influenza into poultry and captive bird flocks since the introduction of **Avian Influenza (Biosecurity measures) Regulations 2022** on 19th September 2022
- A copy of the [Avian Influenza \(Biosecurity measures\) Regulations 2022](#) and [Biosecurity measures Regulations accompanying guidance document](#) are also available on www.gov.ie/birdflu as well as further information on biosecurity

Risk of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza to poultry and captive birds

- Avian Influenza is **highly contagious for birds**. Due to the avian influenza surveillance carried out by DAFM, the disease is known to be circulating widely in wild bird populations, thereby presenting a risk of infection to Irish poultry and captive birds
- The environment can become contaminated with virus through the faeces of infected birds. This presents a potential source of infection for poultry and captive birds
- **Biosecurity is the best defence** against the spread of disease, including avian influenza, to a poultry flock
- Members of the public are reminded **not to touch sick or dead wild birds**. Dogs should be kept on a lead when walking in areas where sick or dead wild birds are present
- **Poultry owners and those working with poultry** should beware of visiting areas, both at home and abroad, where deaths of wild birds have occurred (e.g., coastal areas, bird colonies, etc.). Direct contact with sick or dead wild birds must be avoided

Avian influenza situation in wild birds

- Since the last Avian Influenza Update, issued on the 22nd December 2023, cases of HPAI H5N1 have been confirmed in black headed gulls, herring gulls, a greylag goose, a common buzzard, whooper swans, and common terns. The birds were found in counties Cork, Limerick, Roscommon, Tipperary and Westmeath
- These cases of avian influenza demonstrates that the virus continues to be present in wild birds in both inland and coastal areas of Ireland
- An interactive map (for illustrative purposes) courtesy of the Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis (CVERA) displaying the location of avian influenza cases in wild and captive birds is available at the following link <https://arcg.is/19zHrf0>

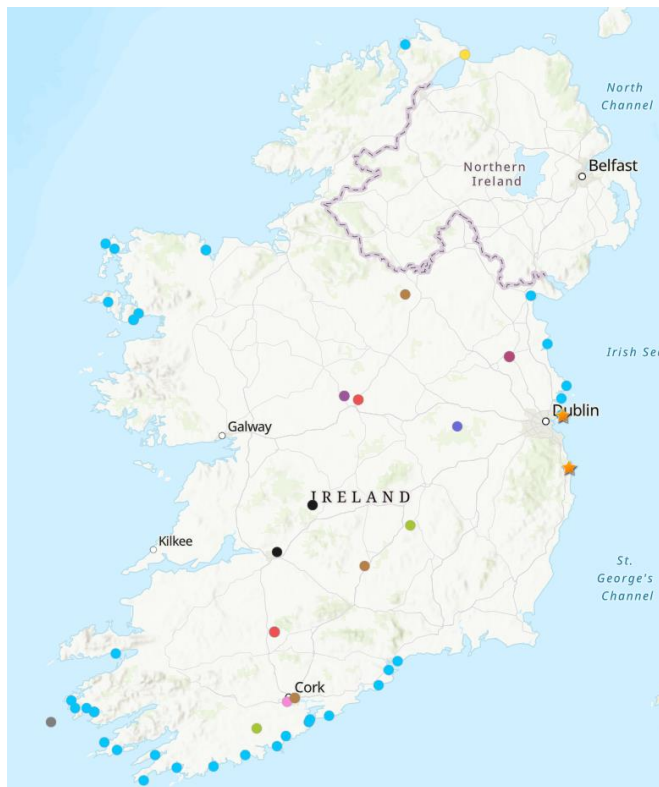
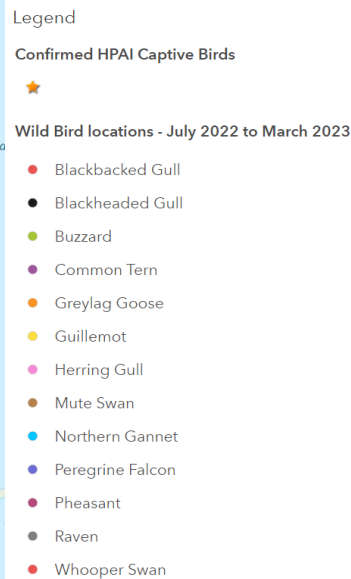


Fig. 1. Locations of H5N1 avian influenza cases in wild birds and outbreaks in captive birds in Ireland since 1st July 2022.



Strict Biosecurity is Essential to Prevent Outbreaks

All poultry owners and keepers must implement very high levels of biosecurity on their holdings to help protect their flocks due to the current situation. All flock owners should ask themselves the following questions to help ensure you are implementing appropriate measures:

1. Who has access to the poultry areas?

Only allow **essential** persons access to the poultry houses e.g. husbandry, veterinary care. Ensure that dedicated clothing or disposable personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn including disposable gloves and overalls. Clean and disinfect boots before entering and immediately upon exiting each poultry house. Wash hands each time upon leaving a poultry house. Dedicated personnel should be appointed to manage each site

2. Have I checked the disinfectant points?

All disinfectant points must be maintained. **Read the label** on the disinfectant which is approved for use against avian influenza. Disinfectant footbaths must be changed regularly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Contamination prevents the effective use of disinfectants. Footwear needs to be cleaned thoroughly before being disinfected in foot dips. **Wait the recommended contact time before entering the house.** Repeat checks with disinfectant points at entry and exit points to the premises

3. Can wild birds get access to the poultry?

Inspect the housing thoroughly. Ensure that there are no gaps where wild birds can enter the housing. Check the gutters and roof. Can contaminated rainwater enter the house? Can wild birds get access to or contaminate the drinking water system?

4. Is the feed and bedding stored securely?

Feed and bedding attract wild birds so secure storage of both is essential. If using straw, ensure it is either double wrapped and covered with a birdproof cover or stored in a shed with no wild bird access. Remove wrapping outside of the house. Feed should be stored in a secure bin and any spills cleaned up immediately. Use wild bird deterrents

5. What do I do about feed delivery/egg collection vehicles that have to come onto the holding?

Disinfect wheels, wheel arches and underbody of all vehicles coming before allowing them to enter the premises and prior to leaving the premises. Do not allow any drivers to enter poultry houses. Ensure that drivers wear disposable gloves and disinfect footwear upon arrival (ensure that there is a disinfectant point near the feed bin/egg storage area)

6. What about equipment?

Any equipment that is used to transport poultry or poultry products must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to being used on the farm e.g., trolleys, trays, pallets, cages etc. Disposable single-use egg trays or plastic Keyes trays which are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each use can be used for egg collections. Don't forget about other equipment such as feeders and watering equipment and clean and disinfect equipment and housing between bird placements

7. Be vigilant

Check the feed and water intake and look for clinical signs of avian influenza. Report any suspicions immediately to DAFM and do not allow anyone on/off the premises pending investigation

Further information regarding Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1

- The disease poses no food safety risk for consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs are safe to eat
- From October onwards each year we enter into the higher risk period for Avian Influenza in Ireland. Colder weather and decreasing daylight can extend the survival time of Avian influenza viruses in the environment
- This is due to the fact that migratory wild birds, the natural hosts of many avian influenza viruses, start to arrive in large numbers to overwinter here
- Migratory wild birds are known to carry the H5N1 subtype of Avian influenza, and this can increase the level of risk for a potential outbreak of Avian influenza in Ireland

- HPAI H5N1 is a notifiable disease both in Ireland and to the European Commission and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, formed known as OIE)
- Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in poultry in Ireland impact upon our international trade in poultry and poultry products
- The disease is highly contagious for birds, but risk of transmission to humans is considered very low.

DAFM surveillance for avian influenza

- Sick or dead wild birds can be reported to DAFM using the **Avian Check - Wild Bird App** <https://aviancheck.apps.services.agriculture.gov.ie/>
- Alternatively, sick or dead wild birds may be reported to the local Regional Veterinary Office or contact the DAFM disease hotline on 01 607 2512 (during office hours) or 01 492 8026 (outside office hours)
- Where the Department has sufficient epidemiological surveillance information in particular geographical areas, it will not necessarily collect dead birds for testing
- DAFM has sufficient evidence of HPAI H5N1 in wild birds in coastal counties. As such, DAFM has stopped collecting birds for surveillance purposes from coastal counties. Surveillance continues as per current protocols in other counties (1 or more bird of prey-including owls, 3 or more waterfowl-including gulls, 5 or more of any other species of bird)
- Where dead wild birds are not required for surveillance purposes, and are present on public land, it is the responsibility of the local authority to safely dispose of the carcasses
- DAFM implements avian influenza surveillance measures which take place right throughout the year in both wild birds and poultry and form part of our well-established Early Warning System for the detection of avian influenza. The submission of dead wild birds which are on the target species list for avian influenza surveillance for testing, based on a risk assessment, at the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory forms part of this programme.

Current Situation in poultry and captive birds in Europe

- Since October 2021 Europe has experienced its largest epidemic of HPAI with over 3,000 outbreaks in poultry and 50 million birds culled in affected establishments ([EFSA, 2022](#))
- See Table 1 for details on the number of recent outbreaks in EU Member States and other European countries reporting to the European Commission's Animal Disease Information System (ADIS)
- Since 1st October 2022 Northern Ireland reported one outbreak of avian influenza in captive birds

- Since 1st October 2022 England confirmed 148 outbreaks of HPAI, 21 in Scotland, and five in Wales
- The Animal and Plant Health Agency’s (APHA) interactive map of restriction zones in England, Scotland and Wales is available to view [here](#)

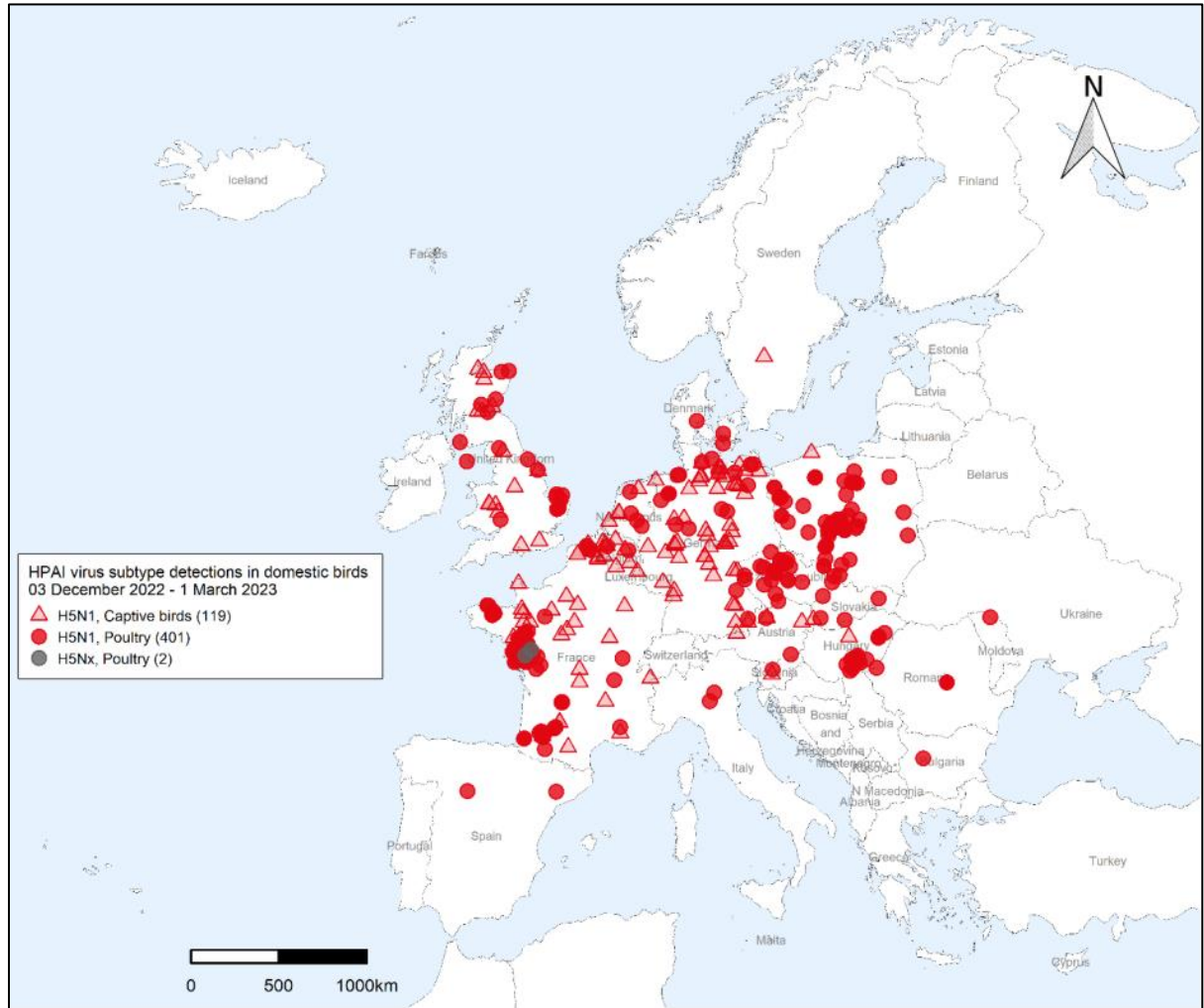


Fig. 2. Locations of outbreaks of HPAI in poultry and captive birds in Europe in the period 3rd December 2022- 1st March 2023 (Source: [EFSA](#)).

Outbreaks and cases of HPAI in EU Member States and other reporting countries				
Country/Territory	Poultry	Captive birds	Wild birds	Total
France	293	70	315	678
Germany	61	128	472	661
Netherlands	22	15	269	306
Belgium	11	19	198	228
Italy	31	1	164	196
Poland	89	1	50	140
Hungary	118	2	18	138
Austria	3	5	97	105
Switzerland		1	86	87
Denmark	5	1	75	81

Spain	2		70	72
Sweden		1	40	41
Czech Republic	28		6	34
Romania	3		23	26
Norway	2		23	25
Slovenia	1	1	22	24
Ireland	2	2	13	17
United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)		1	11	12
Iceland			11	11
Slovakia	3	1	6	10
Croatia	1		4	5
Serbia			4	4
Cyprus	1	1	1	3
Luxembourg		1	2	3
Bulgaria	2			2
France (Reunion)	1	1		2
Moldova	2			2
Türkiye	2			2
Estonia	1			1
Lithuania		1		1
North Macedonia		1		1
Portugal			1	1
Grand Total	684	254	1981	2919

Table 1. Number of confirmed outbreaks and cases of HPAI in poultry, captive birds and wild birds in EU Member States and other countries reporting to ADIS during the period 1st October 20th March (Source: ADIS)

Current wild bird situation in the rest of Europe

- HPAI H5N1 is currently circulating in wild birds across Europe. An increased number of HPAI detections in seabirds has been observed since December 2022, mainly in gull species and particularly in black-headed gulls (large mortality events were observed in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy) ([EFSA, 2023](#))
- Locations of HPAI detections in wild birds in the period 3rd December 2022- 1st March 2023 can be found in Fig. 3
- DAERA's interactive map viewer displaying locations of cases of avian influenza in wild birds in Northern Ireland which is available to view [here](#)

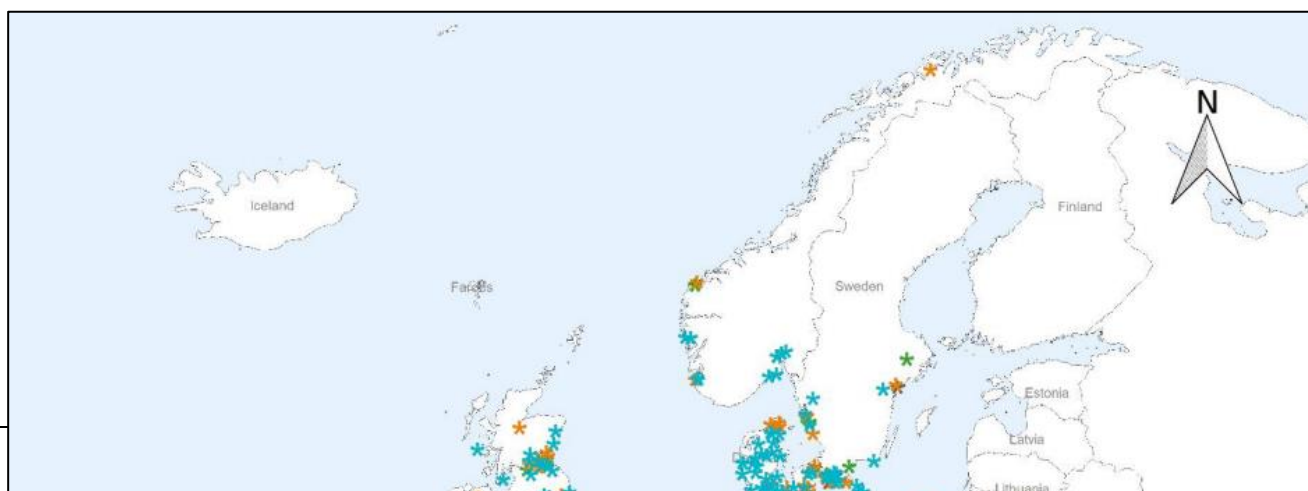


Fig. 3. Detections of HPAI in wild bird categories in the period 3rd December 2022- 1st March 2023 (Source: [EFSA](#)).

Current global Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza situation

- HPAI continues to be reported in poultry and wild birds globally
- HPAI has continued to spread southward in the Americas, from Mexico to southern Chile. Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela have detected the presence of HPAI for the first time ([WOAH, 2023](#)). The Peruvian pelican was the most frequently reported infected species with thousands of deaths being reported ([EFSA, 2023](#)).
- Since December 2022, the number of reports of HPAI increased in Asia by approximately fourfold and three more countries (Kazakhstan, Nepal, Philippines and Turkey) have reported outbreaks ([EFSA, 2023](#))
- The global distribution of outbreaks/ cases in poultry and wild birds during the 3rd December 2022- 1st March 2023 can be found in Fig. 4.

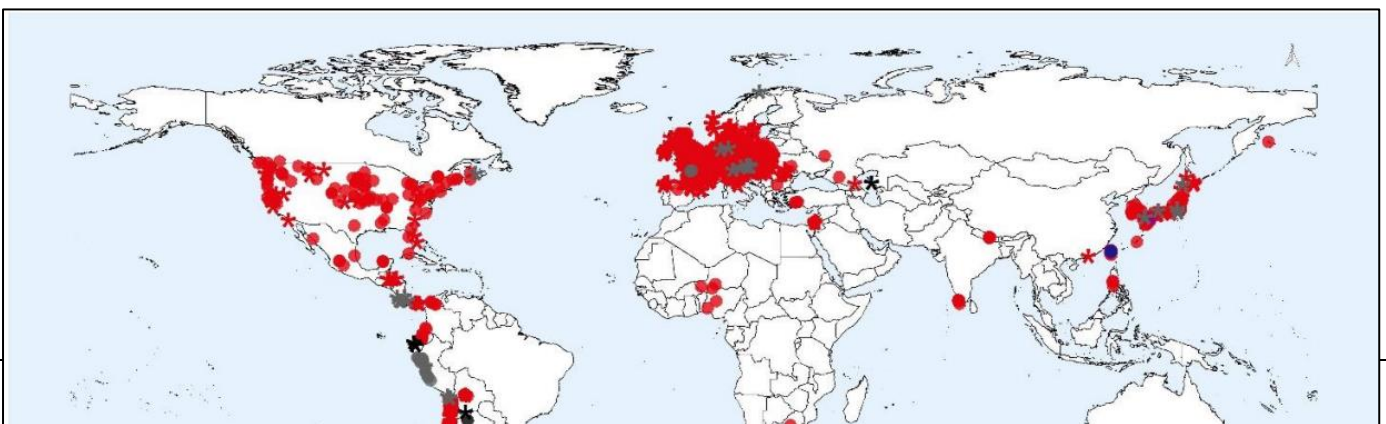


Fig. 4. Global distribution of HPAI in poultry and wild birds reported during the period 3rd December 2022- 1st March 2023 (Source: [EFSA](#)).

What can poultry owners do to reduce the risk of avian influenza?

- Flock owners should **remain vigilant for any unexplained signs of disease** in their flocks, and report any disease suspicion to their nearest [Regional Veterinary Office](#)

1. Be vigilant- Monitor your birds carefully for any clinical signs of disease. If in doubt, contact your veterinary practitioner for advice. Signs of avian influenza include:

- Death/high mortalities in a flock
- Depression/lethargy
- Loss of appetite
- Respiratory distress such as gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling
- Swelling and blue discolouration of combs, wattles, neck and throat
- Diarrhoea
- Reduced egg production or no egg production

2. Biosecurity

A copy of the Avian Influenza (Biosecurity measures) Regulations 2022, accompanying guidance document and additional species specific biosecurity leaflets can be found [here](#).

Personnel and Visitors

- Wear disposable or dedicated outer clothing when in contact with your birds
- Wear boots that can be disinfected, disposable gloves and wash hands after contact with poultry
- Only allow essential personnel access to your birds

Buildings and Equipment

- Regularly clean and disinfect hard surfaces such as paths and walkways

- Provide clean boot washing and disinfection facilities at all entrances/exits and ensure that people use them
- Clean and disinfect any vehicles or equipment that comes into contact with the birds after use
- Have suitable pest control in place

Wild Birds

- Feed and water birds inside or at least under cover
- Clean up any waste feed in outdoor areas frequently
- Use netting or wild bird decoys or deterrents to keep wild birds away from poultry areas

Management

- Keep ducks and geese separate to other poultry species
- The Department also reminds all poultry owners, including those who keep only 1 or 2 birds, of their legal obligation to register their premises with the Department.
- Use an [approved disinfectant](#) against Avian influenza in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Further information:

DAFM has a wide variety of biosecurity resources for avian influenza- please see:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e230-poultry/>

To register a poultry flock:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/984df6-poultry-register/>

RVO contact details:

[Regional Veterinary Office](#)

List of target species of wild birds for avian influenza surveillance:

[List of Target Species for Avian Influenza Surveillance](#)

European Commission

https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/animal-diseases/diseases-and-control-measures/avianinfluenza_en

World Organisation for Animal Health:

[Avian Influenza - WOA - World Organisation for Animal Health](#)

European Food Safety Authority:

<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/avian-influenza>

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