

Due to the increased popularity of backyard poultry keeping, veterinarians may find that they are sometimes asked to examine and treat poultry (frequently chickens) from such flocks. It is therefore important to be aware of and consider some of the common diseases that can affect backyard poultry to aid the investigation and differential diagnosis of bird and flock health problems. Similarly, it is also important to consider legislation and regulations that are relevant to poultry.

The following provides general advice and guidance about keeping backyard poultry in Great Britain (GB). Separate information is also available summarising common health and disease problems of backyard flocks in GB. Similarly, AHVLA guidance and information is also available for gamebird flocks and keepers:

- Common diseases of backyard poultry in Great Britain (excluding gamebirds)
- Gamebirds bird keeping in Great Britain: General guidance
- Common diseases of gamebirds birds in Great Britain

## Backyard poultry keeping - Regulations and guidance

If you keep, or intend to keep poultry, there are rules and regulations that you must be aware of. Defra have provided information that describes specific legislation, regulations and guidance for poultry keepers, which is relevant to small- and larger-scale poultry flocks, including:

- Information on poultry health, specific diseases and infections, biosecurity, hygiene and the responsibility to report suspected outbreaks of notifiable disease: <https://www.gov.uk/poultry-health>.
- Guidance that deals specifically with poultry welfare considerations: <https://www.gov.uk/poultry-welfare-guidance-on-the-farm>.
- General requirements and information for poultry keepers, including registering your flock. It is a legal requirement for anyone responsible for a poultry premises with a total of 50 or more birds to register their flock. The birds do not all have to be of the same species, and this requirement applies even if you stock birds for only part of the year. Keepers with less than 50 birds are also encouraged to register voluntarily: <https://www.gov.uk/poultry-farms-general-regulations>.
- Medicine prescription, use and compliance with withdrawal periods for meat- and egg-producing birds: <https://www.gov.uk/poultry-farms-general-regulations#withdrawal-periods-for-poultry-medicines>.
- Information about feeding kitchen scraps or leftovers and/or catering waste to poultry - this is illegal and may spread notifiable or other diseases: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/disease-control/abp/collect-feed/ban-kitchen-scraps-pet/>

Further information is also available for poultry/gamebird keepers in Scotland and Wales:

- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/Livestock/eggs>
- <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/ahw/?lang=en>

## Notifiable avian diseases

When attending or discussing sick poultry, vets and poultry keepers must be aware of the two notifiable avian diseases - Avian influenza (AI) and Newcastle disease (ND). If notifiable disease is suspected in a poultry flock, by law you must notify your local AHVLA office: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/about-us/contact-us/field-services/>.

Further information about AI and ND is also available:

- OIE information on Avian influenza & Newcastle disease: [www.oie.int/](http://www.oie.int/)
- Avian influenza: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/disease-control/notifiable/avian-influenza/>
- Avian Influenza: Recognising avian notifiable diseases 1. Irvine R.M., *In Practice*, September 2013, 35(8), pp. 426-437, available online: <http://inpractice.bmj.com/content/35/8/426.full.pdf+html>
- Newcastle disease: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/disease-control/notifiable/nd/>
- Newcastle disease: Recognising avian notifiable diseases 2. Irvine R.M., *In Practice*, October 2013, 35(9), pp. 518-523, available online: <http://inpractice.bmj.com/content/35/9/518.full.pdf+html>
- Clinical disease investigations and differential diagnoses in poultry: Recognising avian notifiable diseases 3. Irvine R.M., *In Practice*, November 2013, 35(10), pp. 597-600, available online: <http://inpractice.bmj.com/content/35/10/597.full.pdf+html>

## Zoonotic risks

Healthy birds may harbour potentially zoonotic organisms such as *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. Owners/keepers should therefore wear suitable protective clothing and practice good personal hygiene. Further information is also available at: <https://www.gov.uk/poultry-health#zoonoses---infections-passed-from-animals-to-humans>.

## Backyard flock and poultry health

Health risks to backyard poultry are posed by a number of factors, including poor biosecurity and the sourcing and mixing of birds of unknown health and/or vaccinal status. It is important for all poultry keepers to maintain good levels of knowledge about flock management, husbandry, health problems and disease prevention.

Veterinary advice should be sought in a timely manner on both the prevention of disease, and if bird or flock health problems are experienced. When investigating poultry health problems, first principles of clinical veterinary investigation are applicable, starting with a full clinical history. It is also recommended to make a veterinary flock health plan, and all poultry keepers should keep good records, including a medicines book.

It is important to ensure that high standards of flock biosecurity and hygiene are kept at all times, coupled with high quality management and husbandry, to maintain good standards of poultry health and welfare.

Other information about backyard poultry-keeping, health and diseases is also available:

- Houghton-Wallace J. & Lister S., (2012). Backyard poultry 1. Husbandry and general management. *In Practice*, 34(3), pp. 136-145, available online: <http://inpractice.bmj.com/content/34/3/136.full.pdf+html>
- Lister S. & Houghton-Wallace J., (2012). Backyard poultry 2. Veterinary care and disease control. *In Practice*, 34(4), pp. 214-225, online: <http://inpractice.bmj.com/content/34/4/214.full.pdf+html>
- Roberts, V. (2012). Meeting the needs of smallholders. *In Practice*, 34(5), pp. 300-303, available online: <http://inpractice.bmj.com/content/34/5/300.full.pdf+html>