



Often heard, frequently misunderstood, “biosecurity” is a set of practices that all poultry owners should know and implement to protect their poultry flocks from disease. Birds that are raised under pastured or free-range management styles are particularly in need of attention due to their increased exposure to environmental disease sources.

What is biosecurity?

Biosecurity is the practice of minimizing the spread of disease into a flock of birds, or in the event of disease occurrence, preventing the spread of disease-causing organisms off the premises. This is accomplished through practical, common-sense prevention measures.

Common Routes of Infection

- Exposure to diseased birds, either wild or from purchased stocks of questionable origin.
- Introduction of healthy birds who have recovered from disease but are now pathogen carriers.
- Shoes and clothing of visitors or caretakers who have been in contact with other birds.
- Use of borrowed equipment that is contaminated with disease organisms.
- Rodents and free-flying birds gaining access to poultry housing and feed sources.

Of all the possible breakdowns in biosecurity, the introduction of new birds into an existing flock and contaminated foot traffic pose the greatest risk to bird health. Properly managing these two factors should be a top priority.

Know the Warning Signs

Early detection is important to prevent the spread of disease. Look for changes in eating, drinking, behavioral habits, and for signs and sounds of respiratory distress.

- Sudden increase in bird deaths
- Nasal and eye discharge
- Lack of energy and poor appetite
- A drop in egg production or an increase in soft or thin shelled eggs
- Swelling around the eyes, neck, and head
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs and legs
- Tremors, drooping wings, twisting of the head and neck.

If your birds are sick or dying, call your local county extension office, or the Georgia Poultry Laboratory Network located in Gainesville, Georgia. Each office can assist you by use of a disease diagnostic questionnaire to help identify the severity and level of concern over the symptoms your birds are experiencing.

Disease Prevention Practices

Because of the destructive potential that a contagious poultry disease could have on our commercial industry and small flocks alike, poultry owners are encouraged to adopt the following:

- Prevent wild birds, particularly waterfowl, from coming in contact with the flock. This may require penning of free roaming poultry during times of heightened concern of Avian Influenza.
- Avoid purchasing or coming in contact with other birds and flocks, particularly birds of questionable origin from auctions and live bird markets. Those birds may have an infection or become susceptible to an infection that is already present in birds that appear healthy in the existing flock.
- New birds represent a greater risk to biosecurity because their disease status is often unknown. Purchase new stock from reputable dealers - those that participate with the National Poultry Improvement Plan.
- Quarantine all new birds away from the existing flock for at least 3 weeks. This will help identify birds recently exposed to disease that have yet to show symptoms, though it will not identify those that have previously been sick, have recovered, and continue to shed pathogens. Sick birds that survive such viral disease become carriers of the virus and can infect previously unexposed birds in the existing flock.
- Wear dedicated footwear that can be sanitized after every visit when attending to your birds. Disinfectant footbaths may help to decrease the dose of organisms on footwear that can be tracked into poultry enclosures.
- Do not share equipment, tools, or poultry supplies with other bird owners. If you do bring these items home, clean and disinfect them before they are used in association with your poultry.

During this time of heightened concern over the threat of Avian Influenza, due vigilance is warranted for backyard poultry keepers and commercial growers alike.

Resources:

UGA Poultry Science Avian Flu Information page
<http://extension.uga.edu/topics/poultry/avian-flu/>

Avian Influenza: Frequently Asked Questions
<http://extension.uga.edu/topics/poultry/avian-flu/documents/AI-FAQ.pdf>

United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/sa_animal_disease_information/sa_avian_health/sa_biosecurity_for_birds/