

# Understanding avian influenza

Avian influenza, also known as bird flu, is a highly contagious viral disease that affects domestic and wild birds. At times, it can also affect mammal species, including humans. Beyond its impacts on animal health, the disease has devastating effects on the poultry industry, threatening workers' livelihoods, food security and international trade.

## Death of infected and exposed birds leads to:



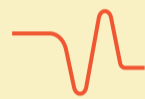
Reduced amount of poultry products



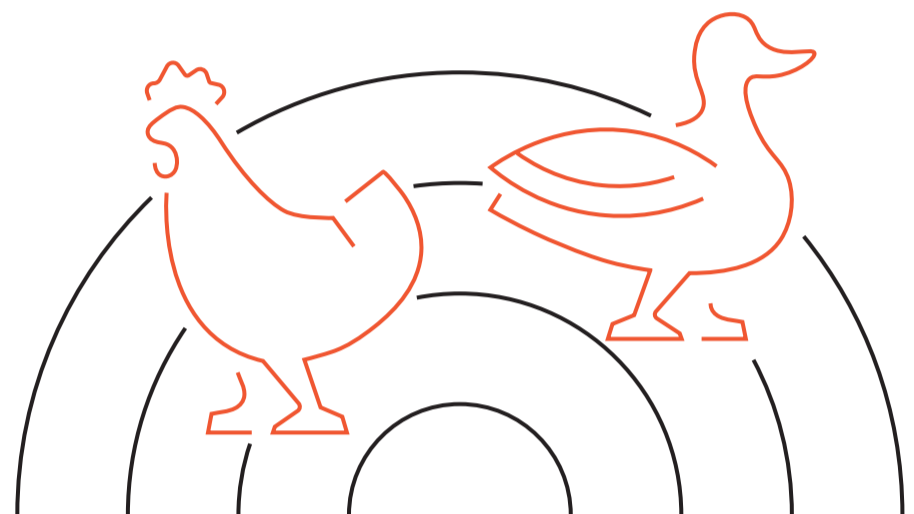
Higher costs of poultry products



Job losses in the whole poultry production chain



Endangered animal welfare



## More recently, the global spread of avian influenza has raised concerns



- Unprecedented number of outbreaks around the world.
- Die-offs of wild birds, threatening biodiversity.
- Increase of land and sea mammals avian influenza infections. The viruses adapting to mammals can indicate a bigger risk to animals other than birds and to humans.
- Sporadic human cases, usually due to exposure to infected birds from backyard poultry and in live bird markets.

Avian influenza can spread easily through direct contact with secretions from infected birds, especially through faeces or contaminated feed and water.

Several factors can facilitate its spread:

- Migrating birds, especially waterfowl, along their migratory pathways to neighbouring countries and over long distances.
- Loss of natural habitats of wild birds and anthropisation can facilitate transmission to poultry and again to wild birds.
- From farm to farm, through the movement of infected animals, as well as through contaminated materials, such as vehicles.
- International and illegal trade of birds.

## Leading the fight against avian influenza

The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) is at the forefront of tackling avian influenza by:



Sharing essential epidemiological information reported to the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS) with the international community. This allows them to follow the evolution of the disease and better prepare for and respond to outbreaks.



Establishing science-based international standards providing for prevention and control methods.



Promoting collaboration across sectors using a One Health approach, essential to stop the disease spread.

Learn more with:



Our [webpage](#) on avian influenza



Our [situation reports](#) to follow the disease evolution



Our [WAHIS system](#) and its [distribution list](#) to get informed on the areas affected



World Organisation  
for Animal Health  
Founded as OIE

[www.woah.org](http://www.woah.org)