

Guidelines for managing wildlife infected with H5 bird flu on public land

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Purpose

These guidelines are for public land managers to support the management of dead wildlife following the declaration of a H5N1 avian influenza (H5 bird flu) outbreak in Victoria.

Once H5 bird flu has been detected in Victoria, public land managers will be responsible for managing the risk to public health and amenity on the land that they manage.

These guidelines should be considered in your Emergency Response Plan and any specific Incident Management Plans that your organisation may already have in place to ensure you are prepared for an outbreak of H5 bird flu.

Which organisations do these guidelines apply to?

The guidelines apply to all organisations that manage public land, including:

- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)
- Parks Victoria
- Traditional Owner Corporations
- Catchment Management Authorities
- The Phillip Island Nature Parks
- Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority
- Game Management Authority
- Alpine Resorts Victoria

- Councils
- Volunteer Committees of Management
- Royal Botanical Gardens
- Water Corporations
- Port Authorities

Background

Avian influenza is a viral disease of birds that is found globally. The avian influenza virus strains are described as low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI) or high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI). Most LPAI strains of the bird flu virus cause minimal disease in wild birds and poultry. However, some LPAI strains can evolve into HPAI strains when they spread among poultry. The recent H7 bird flu is an example of a HPAI strain that impacted a number of commercial poultry farms in Victoria.

The H5N1 strain of bird flu (commonly called H5 bird flu) is a serious and highly contagious strain spreading globally, causing widescale death of poultry as well as wild birds and a range of native wildlife (such as seals and dolphins). The H5 bird flu strain is currently impacting all other parts of the world, except for Australia/Oceania, where it has not yet been detected.

Due to the spread of H5 bird flu globally, there is an increased risk of this disease arriving in Australia and affecting local wild birds and other native wildlife. We must remain aware of the threat and prepare for H5 bird flu arriving in Australia.

H5 bird flu differs from other avian influenza strains as it is more infectious and can cause mass mortality in a large number of wild birds. There is no effective treatment for H5 bird flu and the prognosis for birds and some mammals affected with the disease is poor.

As H5 bird flu is highly infectious and can be spread by the movement of birds, people and equipment, biosecurity practices are crucial to minimise further disease spread. Land managers should follow the biosecurity requirements and steps outlined in this document if required to dispose of dead birds.

Signs and symptoms in wild birds

The most important sign to be aware of is sudden death. Other signs of H5 bird flu in wild birds are:

- ruffled feathers, depression, closed eyes
- inability to stand or fly
- diarrhoea
- difficulty breathing, coughing or sneezing
- swelling around the head, neck and eyes
- cloudiness or change in colour of the eyes
- lack of coordination, tremors, swimming in circles
- twisted necks or other unusual posture

H5 bird flu should be considered if a high proportion of a flock or group of birds become ill very quickly – progressing from normal to severe illness or death within 24 to 48 hours. You may not know if the birds have H5 bird flu, however you should treat them as though they do in line with the advice below.

Report sick or dead wildlife

Report sick or dead wildlife, by calling the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888**. You can also report single dead wild birds using the [online Wildlife Disease Reports form](#).

Report clusters (5 or more) of sick or dead wild birds of any species, anywhere in Victoria.

Report even one sick or dead:

- penguin or pelican
- bird of prey (e.g. hawk, owl, eagle)
- black swan
- marine mammal (e.g. seal, sea lion, dolphin)

It is important to note that sick or dead wildlife may be a result of wildlife crime or other diseases. If you are uncertain about the cause of the dead wildlife, please contact the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888** to seek advice.

Health and safety - general advice

H5 bird flu is a zoonotic disease, which means it can be transmitted from animals to humans. Avian influenza infection is rare in people, however people who have close or prolonged contact with infected birds or animals or their contaminated environments are at greater risk of infection. See personal safety advice below for how to handle dead birds to mitigate disease risk for humans.

The Department of Health recommends following these guidelines to reduce your risk of catching H5 bird flu when disposing of dead wildlife:

If disposal is the carcass management action chosen by public land managers (whether in situ or for disposal at another site), this should be done with the minimum required number of appropriately trained people with appropriate health and safety measures.

- Strict attention should be paid to measures which reduce risks to those involved in the collection and disposal operations, such as through appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) as outlined in the personal safety advice section below.
- Maintain a comprehensive list of in-field responder names and contact information for rapid public health follow-up, if needed.
- If relevant, follow any DEECA instructions to notify local health authorities about carcass management activities.
- Clean and disinfect/decontaminate personnel and equipment on site.

See also personal safety advice below for how to handle dead birds to mitigate disease risk for humans.

More information can be found at Communicable Disease Network Australia (CDNA) [national guidelines for avian influenza: protecting people who work with birds and wildlife](#) and [WOAH Avian influenza and wildlife: Risk management for people working with wild birds](#).

Control Orders and Legislation

Following an outbreak of H5 bird flu, Agriculture Victoria may declare specific areas are under controlled or restricted access through a Control Order to contain its spread.

- Check if an Infected Area, Control Area or Restricted Area declaration is in place for your region by accessing the latest information on the outbreak on [Agriculture Victoria's website](#) or via VicEmergency.
- If control orders and movement restrictions are in place for your region, you must follow the requirements of the controlled or restricted area outlined by Agriculture Victoria.
- Some infected places may also be placed under a Quarantine Notice.

If there is not a declared emergency for an H5 bird flu outbreak, it remains an offence under the *Wildlife Act 1975* to interfere with native wildlife, even when dead, and so land managers should leave wildlife in situ to decompose naturally where possible.

Latest information

During an emergency animal disease outbreak like H5 bird flu, the situation is dynamic and therefore advice on restrictions is likely to change. This means it is important that land managers keep up-to-date and aware of changing restrictions and advice.

Please continue to check the Agriculture Victoria website during a declared emergency for the latest information, as the restrictions and advice in these Guidelines are subject to change.

Managing dead wild birds on public land

Procedure for managing small numbers of dead wild birds on public land using general waste management services:

In most cases, fewer than 5 dead wild birds can be managed by leaving them to decompose naturally or where practicable by putting them in the normal general waste bin. However, even a single dead bird of the following species should be reported to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on **1800 675 888**:

- penguin or pelican
- bird of prey (e.g. hawk, owl, eagle)
- black swan

DEECA will then advise what action should be taken.

In all other instances, it is important to first check the [Agriculture Victoria website](#) to see if there are any control orders in place for your location. If there are control orders in place, land managers will need to follow the requirements set by DEECA in those orders.

Even if there are no control orders in place, good biosecurity practices and use of personal protective equipment (PPE), as outlined under the personal safety advice section, are critical to reduce the risk of spreading the disease to other environments, as H5 bird flu can spread through the movement of birds, people and equipment.

Note: these guidelines apply to public land. Private landowners may be able to bury small numbers of dead birds on their properties if the land is suitable.

If there are no control orders in place for the location and DEECA is not collecting the birds for testing, then land managers should manage dead wild birds as follows:

1. Leave the dead wild birds to decompose naturally

Where possible, the preferred approach is to avoid touching the dead wild birds and leave them to decompose naturally if they are not readily accessible to members of the public or do not present a public amenity or safety issue.

2. Use your normal general waste service

Where it is not possible to leave dead wild birds to decompose naturally and small numbers need to be removed to manage a public safety or public amenity issue, the dead animals can be disposed using existing general waste collection service.

Where practicable, birds can be placed in the normal general waste bins or disposed through private general waste collections as putrescible waste. The disposal should occur in accordance with the double-bagging advice outlined in the personal safety advice section below.

Animal carcasses must not be disposed of through other existing services such as Recycling and Food Organic and Garden Organic (FOGO) services.

Personal safety

When collecting and disposing of dead wild birds, those undertaking the activity should protect themselves and minimise risk of spreading the disease to new environments through the following practices:

- do not touch the dead wild birds with bare hands
 - wear a face mask (a P2/N95 respirator is preferred, or a disposable surgical face mask if P2/N95 is not available), protective eyewear (goggles preferred, or face shield), long-sleeved clothing, disposable gloves or gloves that can be disinfected and shoes that can be cleaned before moving any dead wild birds
- double bag the dead wild birds:

- use tongs, a shovel or other appropriate equipment to handle the dead wild birds and place them in a plastic bag and tie it off (alternatively, use an inverted bag to pick up the bird and turn the bag back on itself)
- the first bag is then to be placed in a second leak proof plastic bag, ensuring not to contaminate the outside of the outer bag
- remove any disposable gloves and place them in the second bag
- tie and close the second bag and dispose of it in the municipal or general waste bin
- wash any clothing or clean and disinfect any equipment or materials that may have touched the bird
- clean and disinfect any materials and equipment used
- wash hands with soap and hot water or use an alcohol-based hand rub (60-80% ethanol) before and after handling dead wild birds.

Further details about how to clean and disinfect equipment and clothing are available on Agriculture Victoria's [Information for farm visitors webpage](#).

If you are not able to follow these guidelines or wish to take extra precautionary steps, you should consider avoiding close contact with pet birds and poultry for 48 hours after handling dead wildlife which might have H5 bird flu.

Procedure for managing large numbers of dead wild birds on public land that cannot be managed through general waste management services:

For large numbers of dead wild birds that cannot reasonably be managed within the normal waste management service and need removing, contact the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888** for advice.

Large numbers of dead wild birds that require removal may be managed through the Victorian Government's H5 bird flu outbreak response process. This may include DEECA directing land managers to remove and dispose of them on its behalf as part of the response.

Where DEECA does not require the dead wild birds to be removed as part of the response (for example, they did not die due to H5 bird flu or there is minimal risk to public health or amenity), land managers need to manage the animals in line with their usual practices, such as handling the animals safely with appropriate PPE and disposing of them to a suitably permissioned putrescible landfill.

Note: Dead wild birds and wildlife do not need to go to a landfill that can take biosecurity waste, as the animals are not considered by the EPA Victoria to be quarantine and biosecurity waste.

Managing other dead wildlife (mammals) on public land

Although H5 bird flu primarily affects wild birds, it can also affect some mammals. Sick or dead mammals can carry a range of diseases that can cause illness in humans, including avian influenza.

In most cases, and where there are no control orders in place for your location because of an H5 bird flu outbreak, small numbers (less than 5) of dead wild land mammals can be managed by leaving the animals to decompose naturally or disposed the same way as for wild birds through your organisation's current waste management service, noting that the size of the animals may need direct engagement with your waste provider.

However, even a single dead marine mammal (e.g. seal, sea lion, dolphin) or large numbers of dead land mammals should be reported to the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888**.

Restricting access to the land you manage

If control orders (infected area, quarantine area) are put in place, relevant restrictions will need to be followed. Decisions to close/restrict access to land under a control order will be made by the Incident Controller and Chief Veterinary Officer in a response.

Land managers may also wish to restrict access to public land as part of managing public safety and amenity.

For small areas involving dead wild birds and wildlife, land managers may cordon off affected sites in line with your organisation's operational policies.

Where land managers are considering restricting access to larger areas including roads, you should consult with DEECA through the H5 response, and VicRoads or other relevant authorities as appropriate.

Traditional Owner H5 bird flu response

DEECA is committed to supporting self-determination and building meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owners, including early genuine engagement and participation in decision-making.

Many birds and animals hold deep cultural significance for Traditional Owners. They have spiritual connections with a range of species and each group has different cultural protocols and obligations for different species. Some Traditional Owner groups have their own emergency management protocols and these need to be followed on a place-based basis.

- When proposing to remove large numbers of dead wild birds or dead wildlife on the land you manage, please call the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888**
- DEECA will advise the relevant Traditional Owner Corporation if necessary and liaise with you if required.

Q&A

How can land managers prepare for a H5 bird flu outbreak?

You should prepare or review your existing organisational policies, your *Environment Protection Act 2017* (the EP Act) obligations and your OH&S guidelines to make sure they are up to date with biosecurity requirements. You should also familiarise yourself with your Emergency Response Plan or Incident Management Plan that you may already have in place for your organisation.

What do land managers do if an outbreak happens?

When an outbreak is declared, you should notify relevant people within your organisation and follow the advice contained in these '*Guidelines for managing wildlife infected with H5 bird flu on public land*' (the **Guidelines**).

You should also check the Agriculture Victoria website and understand if any restrictions apply in your area.

When should land managers remove dead wild birds or wildlife?

If there is a risk to public amenity or public health by leaving dead animals in place (for example, at a public playground or on the foreshore of a popular lake used for recreation), then it may be necessary to collect and dispose of the animals in line with these guidelines.

What does an infected, restricted or control area mean?

In the event of an outbreak, Agriculture Victoria may impose restrictions or movement controls over a region to contain the extent of an outbreak of H5 bird flu. In this case you need to follow any restrictions that may be in place for your area. You can check the most up to date advice on Agriculture Victoria's [Avian influenza webpage](#).

Can land managers (or members of the public) touch or move dead or sick wild birds or wildlife?

The preference is to leave any dead wild birds or wildlife to decompose naturally. You should avoid touching or moving dead wild birds or wildlife given the risk of infection from a range of diseases that they may carry, including avian influenza. If the wildlife is sick, call the EAD hotline on 1800 675 888 to seek advice.

Should the presence of dead wild birds or wildlife present a public amenity issue, the advice for removing and managing them as outlined in these **Guidelines** should be followed.

What personal protective equipment do land managers (or the person undertaking the removal and disposal) need when managing dead birds or wildlife?

You should have a standard suite of personal protective equipment on hand to manage the removal of dead wild birds or wildlife, including;

- a face mask (a P2/N95 respirator is preferred, or a disposable surgical face mask if P2/N95 is not available)
- protective eyewear (goggles or face shield is preferred)
- long sleeved clothing and long trousers
- disposable gloves or gloves that can be disinfected
- closed toe shoes/boots that can be cleaned

You also need to make sure that you understand and comply with your OH&S obligations and general environmental duties under the EP Act in these circumstances.

For more information on your general environmental duty under the EP Act, visit the EPA's [General environmental duty for businesses webpage](#).

For more information on PPE and safe practices see the [CDNA national guidelines for avian influenza: protecting people who work with birds and wildlife](#)

For general advice about bird flu see the [Department of Health's Bird flu webpage](#)

Can land managers close areas of public land to manage the removal of dead wild birds or wildlife?

Yes, you should follow your existing work practices if you need to close or restrict public access to manage the removal of dead wild birds or wildlife on the public land that you manage.

What constitutes a 'small number' of dead birds or wildlife?

There is no fixed threshold to define a 'small number' as it will depend on the species being considered. For the purposes of this document, a small number of animals is a number of dead animals that can be reasonably removed through normal general waste management services.

What should land managers do if they (or members of the public) have found large numbers of dead wild birds or wildlife?

You should contact the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888** and seek advice. You may be advised that managing these dead wild birds or wildlife will be supervised and undertaken through the Victorian Government's H5 bird flu response process. Do not touch the birds and follow biosecurity requirements until you've been advised of next steps.

Should land managers contact Traditional Owners if they need to remove dead wild birds or wildlife?

No. Land managers should contact the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888** to confirm that DEECA has arrangements in place regarding engaging with traditional owners.

What should land managers do if they suspect that dead wild birds or wildlife died because of wildlife crime or other diseases?

Call the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888** and seek advice.

It is important to leave the birds in situ while you obtain advice as this ensures continuity of evidence and allows the Conservation Regulator to conduct a thorough investigation where required.

What is the waste category of dead wildlife that needs disposing via the general waste management service?

Any dead wildlife collected by a local council, or on behalf of a local council as part of their standard waste management processes, is categorised as putrescible municipal waste. This waste must be taken to a lawful place. No permit under the EP Act is required to transport the waste. A lawful place includes a landfill permitted to take municipal waste.

Any dead wildlife collected by a different public land manager or a business is categorised as putrescible industrial waste. This includes when a local council has contracted the clean-up of dead birds to another business (i.e. due to the volume and/or scale of the clean up being beyond the capacity of their normal waste management services). This waste must be taken to a lawful place. No permit under the EP Act is required to transport the waste. A lawful place includes a landfill permitted to take putrescible industrial waste.

Note: Dead wild birds and wildlife do not need to go to a landfill that can take biosecurity waste, as the animals are not considered to be quarantine and biosecurity waste (T340).

Do I need to clean or decontaminate vehicles and equipment after cleaning up dead wildlife?

Land managers are encouraged to clean vehicles and equipment to reduce the spread of disease. Fully decontaminating vehicles and equipment at a level used for eradicating disease is not required for dead wildlife. Land managers are encouraged to:

- Wash any clothing or clean and disinfect any equipment or materials that may have touched the animal
- Clean and disinfect any materials and equipment used
- Wash your hands with soap and hot water or use an alcohol-based hand rub (60-80% ethanol) before and after handling dead wildlife.

What type of vehicles can be used to transport dead wildlife?

Land managers are encouraged to use vehicles and vessels that can be sealed and covered to reduce the risk of spreading the disease to commercial poultry farms. The animals should be double bagged in line with the safety advice in these **Guidelines**. Normal waste management vehicles used for general waste services can be used.

Who will pay for the clean-up of dead wild birds and wildlife?

Land managers may be eligible to be reimbursed for waste management costs that are more than their normal clean-up costs for managing public land.

Please confirm with DEECA by contacting the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888** before proceeding with any clean-up beyond typical dead wildlife management to ensure the activities are eligible.

National cost-sharing arrangements are in place for responding to an H5 bird flu outbreak and include costs for managing waste and laboratory services for testing.

Where can large numbers of dead wild bird and wildlife be taken?

Leaving animals in place is the first preference. If not an option, they can be disposed of through your organisation's current waste management practice, buried on-site (with approval from EPA), or taken to a suitable waste management site subject to EPA approvals and DEECA advice. Where possible, dead wild birds and wildlife, particularly totem species important to the Traditional Owners, should be managed on-Country. Contact the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888** to seek advice.