

For Immediate Release

January 6, 2026

Subject: Chicken flock depopulated due to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)

Dukes County, MA – After receiving a confirmatory test result for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) safely depopulated and disposed of a flock of chickens in Dukes County on 1/6/2026. The affected area will be subject to a fallow period for 120 days, during which time there will be no poultry allowed into or out of the facility.

MDAR has assessed poultry product distribution and found no contaminated products were distributed. Thus there is no risk advisory for an HPAI infection from consuming eggs or chicken, and common sense food safety is encouraged to prevent foodborne illness.

While seasonal influenza is on the rise in Massachusetts, it is not the same as Avian Influenza. If you have been in direct contact with sick or dead birds, especially poultry or waterfowl, and develop flu-like symptoms, contact your medical provider and inform them of your animal exposure so that you can get appropriate testing and care. Local Boards of Health strongly recommend not handling sick or dead birds. If you discover sick or dead birds, follow the reporting instructions below.

HPAI primarily affects shorebirds and wild waterfowl, which are the natural reservoir for the virus. Poultry are highly susceptible to this virus and suffer extremely high mortality rates. Poultry become infected after coming into contact with wild bird feces, feathers, or secretions. To date, there are no human cases of HPAI reported in Massachusetts, and there is minimal risk for those who do not engage in prolonged direct contact with infected animals.

- Report sick or dead poultry at www.mass.gov/reportpoultry and 5 or more sick/dead wild birds at www.mass.gov/reportbirds.
- Protect poultry by keeping birds indoors or in covered pens, avoid tracking dirt/feces into coops, and prevent contact with wild birds. Visit USDA's Defend The Flock www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/defend-the-flock for more recommendations.
- Protect yourself by avoiding direct contact with wild birds without use of personal protective equipment: gloves, a mask, and goggles. It is best to call your local Animal Control for removal of dead birds. See Massachusetts Guidelines here: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/guidance-for-animal-control-officers-responding-to-avian-influenza-mortality-events-public-inquiries>

- Protect pets by leashing dogs, prevent them from interacting with sick or dead birds, and keep cats indoors, as HPAI can be fatal to cats. Do not feed pets “raw diets”.
- Although backyard songbirds are not commonly affected by HPAI, best practice is to abstain from feeding wild birds. Remove birdfeeders, birdbaths, standing water, and other conditions which encourage congregation of wild birds, potentially allowing for the virus to spread more easily.

Boards of Health continue to communicate with state and local agencies and coordinate disease surveillance for all of Martha’s Vineyard. Consistent with MDAR and the USDA policy, affected flocks are reported by county only. HPAI risk to flocks is from wild birds particularly wild waterfowl (geese, swans, ducks) which do not adhere to town lines. It is imperative that flock owners report sick or dead animals immediately so that HPAI can be contained quickly.

For more local information, contact Health Agent Brice Boutot at (508) 627-6120 or health@edgartown-ma.us

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