

## **Notes From Community Forum on Avian Influenza for the Backyard Chicken Owner**

**Wednesday, April 26, 2006, hosted by Liberty Hall of North Portland**

Organized by NWSA AmeriCorps Members (Annie Bergelin, Sera Dixon and Bayley Kavanaugh) for Growing Gardens

**Panelists: Bruce Mueller**, Field Veterinarian for the Oregon Department of Agriculture and **Kari Lyons**, Environmental Educator for Multnomah County Health Department

**Bruce Mueller** Provided background on Avian Influenza throughout history as well as specifics about the current strain's biology and biosecurity measures. The following are highlights. For more information, please check out the useful links provided at the bottom of this page.

Avian Influenza (AI) was first identified in the early 1900s.

The virus comes in both Low Pathogenic and High Pathogenic types.

Pathogenicity varies with virus H and N types (H and N represent different surface proteins on the virus). Pathogenicity is determined by the level of illness in the infected poultry and by the amino acid sequencing of the virus.

In Low Path AI (LPAI), the clinical features (i.e. signs/symptoms of the bird) are not diagnostic. The diagnosis must be made in the lab to identify the virus type.

You will usually know if your birds have High Path AI (HPAI) because a significant number will die without having adequate time to show symptoms.

LPAI is not HPAI.

And HPAI is not automatically Pandemic AI. There are still no fully documented cases of person to person transfer.

How Do Flocks Get Infected?

- It is always related to a breakdown of Biosecurity (birds, people, equipment, etc.)

Biosecurity is the set of precautions taken by the bird owner to minimize the risk of infection (AI or otherwise) that comes from contact with visitors (avian, human, or equipment). For more information on Biosecurity, please check out the useful links below.

Biosecurity- preventing the introduction of infectious agents into a flock:

3 Types of Methods:

- Control human traffic
- Control equipment (Avoid sharing with other bird owners, keep clean, etc.)
- Isolate birds from others (Keep wildlife out. Avoid mixing young and old birds, as they may be more or less susceptible to illness, and be carriers without showing signs)

There is a vaccination developed. It is being stockpiled by the US Government in case of pandemic. It is not currently available for individual use.

Take home points:

- LPAI is not HPAI
- HPAI is not automatically Pandemic AI
- The virus currently of concern has been passed via intimate contact with infected birds.
- Properly handled and cooked poultry products will not spread AI.

**Kari Lyons** is an Environmental Health Educator based out of Vector Control at the County Health Department. She gave information about Multnomah County's preparedness plan and the Specified Animal Permitting Process, as well as useful ideas for communicating with concerned neighbors.

The Health Department has several test chicken flocks spread throughout the county. They regularly test these flocks for West Nile Virus and could easily begin testing for AI (though they are not currently).

The county also tests dead, wild birds for disease. There is a dead bird report available for public use to report dead birds. If you file this form, it will be easier for the county to test birds for potential disease. The form is available online on the Health Department's webpage (see Useful Links section).

Kari Lyons is interested in helping to create a network for backyard chicken owners. This would make it easier for important health information to reach those who are most acutely affected. Please contact her at the MCHD if you are interested in receiving more information.

A Specified Animal Permit is required in Multnomah County if you own over 3 specified animals (includes chickens). Roosters are illegal in the city.

## Question and Answer Session

**Q:** What are some basic things that a backyard bird owner should do to protect their flock?

**A:** Increase your Biosecurity. It's all about deciding what level of risk you are willing to live with. Develop a plan for your coop to minimize the risk of infection (of your birds and yourself).

**Q:** Are free-range birds at higher risk than cooped birds?

**A:** Potentially, yes. They have a higher risk of interacting with wild birds and their feces. Therefore, they have a higher risk of infection. If AI makes it to the Willamette Valley, Bruce Mueller says he would coop his birds.

**Q:** How will we know if our birds are infected?

**A:** You may notice symptoms- drooping heads, swollen sinuses, puffed up looking head. HPAI will most likely kill birds, probably not just one, but a significant number of birds. Getting dead or sick birds tested by a veterinarian will provide the most accurate diagnosis.

**Q:** Is chicken manure safe to use in garden?

**A:** At 135 degrees F (for 10 minutes), AI virus is killed. By composting chicken feces, you kill AI. However, wild bird feces could be potentially hazardous. Again, if AI is in the area, Bruce recommends housing your birds and practicing stricter biosecurity.

**Q:** How concerned should we be about children interacting with the chickens?

**A:** Biosecurity is all about deciding what level of risk you are willing to live with. AI is transmitted via intimate contact with birds. Kari suggests creating a set of rules about the chickens- regarding cleanliness, hand washing, tool cleaning, etc. Even without children, developing biosecurity for your coop is important.

**Q:** What should we tell neighbors who believe that we, as chicken owners, are putting them at high risk of contracting AI?

**A:** First, that AI is contracted via intimate contact with birds. And second, develop a biosecurity plan. Then you can explain it to them and show them the precautions that you are taking. Kari Lyons also offered her services for neighborhood gatherings- to offer further education to concerned citizens. Overall, communication is key to good neighbor relations; keep them updated on your plans.

**Q:** There is a lot of talk about creating a National I.D. system for poultry by 2008. They say this would include marking all poultry for tracking purposes. Will this affect us as backyard chicken owners?

**A:** Unlikely. The driving force is the poultry industry. They want to assure sales with foreign markets, and tracking is becoming more important in order to assure the health of their product. It is highly unlikely that the government will decide to track backyard poultry, as it would not be economically advantageous.

**Q:** Growing Gardens has hosted a Tour de Coops the past two years. Is it safe to do again this year?

**A:** Potentially, yes. If you practice biosecurity, you will minimize the risk of transferring any illness (not just AI). Some options are footbaths or shoe coverings at each site. Keeping chickens housed before and during the tour will minimize fecal material in walking areas. And including lots of good information to all participants will keep everyone safer.

There was certainly other information shared at this Forum, but these were the highlights. Please check out the Useful Links Section for more information. And if you are interested, you can sign up with Growing Gardens email list to receive more information about AI and other chicken related things.

## **Useful Links:**

Oregon Department of Agriculture: <http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/>

ODA Avian Influenza Information: [http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/AHID/animal\\_health/ai.shtml](http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/AHID/animal_health/ai.shtml)

Multnomah County Health Department: <http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/health/>

MCHD Avian Flu Fact Sheet: [http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/health/documents/avian\\_flu\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/health/documents/avian_flu_factsheet.pdf)

Multnomah County Health Department Avian Influenza Resources:  
[http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/health/documents/pandemic\\_flu\\_06.pdf](http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/health/documents/pandemic_flu_06.pdf)

Multnomah County Specified Animal Permit Information:  
[http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/health/vector/documents/sap\\_permit\\_req.pdf](http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/health/vector/documents/sap_permit_req.pdf)

Grain Homepage: Bird Flu: <http://grain.org/front/?id=84>

US Department of Agriculture: <http://www.usda.gov>

Some USDA Resources:

[http://www.usda.gov/documents/AI\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_Implementation\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/documents/AI_Fact_Sheet_Implementation_Plan.pdf)

<http://www.usda.gov/birdflu>

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>

Backyard Biosecurity: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/birdbiosecurity/>