

Graham Van Tighem
Executive Director
Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board



April 13, 2022

SUBJECT: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in wild birds in Canada

Dear Mr. Van Tighem,

This letter is to inform the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board about the status of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in wild birds in Canada.

What is Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza?

Wild birds in Canada and throughout the world are natural carriers of avian influenza viruses. Avian influenza is a viral infection that is highly contagious among birds and most strains of the virus cause little or no harm. However, these viruses can spread to domestic poultry and, under certain circumstances, to people. Avian Influenza is designated as highly pathogenic when it causes mass disease and mortality in infected poultry. Currently, there have been no human cases of avian influenza from exposure to wild birds in North America.

For more information, please refer to the Government of Canada's website: [Highly pathogenic avian influenza - Canada.ca](https://www24.international.gc.ca/avian-influenza/avian-influenza-eng.aspx)

Status of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Canada

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza was first detected in Canada in the Atlantic Provinces in December 2021 and is now spreading across Canada and the United States. To date, cases have been confirmed in multiple wild bird species including gulls, waterfowl, raptors, and corvids. With the onset of spring migration, we anticipate cases in the North.

The United States Geological Survey has a regularly updated distribution [map](#) to show locations where Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza has been confirmed in wild birds and poultry in North America. There is also a Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza - Wild birds [Dashboard](#) that provides a public interface that displays cases of infections detected in wild birds in Canada.

Hunter Safety

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, it is considered safe to hunt, handle, and eat healthy game birds. There is no evidence to suggest that properly cooked game birds are a source of avian influenza infection for people. However, because exposure to avian influenza can occur when handling wild birds, we recommend being cautious and following the guidance provided on the Government of Canada's website: [Wild birds and avian influenza – Handling guidelines - Canada.ca](https://www24.international.gc.ca/avian-influenza/avian-influenza-eng.aspx)



If you observe a sick or dead wild bird

Signs that a bird may have Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza include: nervousness, tremors or lack of coordination, swelling around the head, neck and eyes, lack of energy or movement, coughing, gasping for air or sneezing, diarrhea, or sudden death. As a general guideline, members of the public should not handle dead wild birds or live birds ***that are acting strangely***. If you observe sick or dead birds and suspect that disease may be involved, contact Yukon's "Turn in Poachers and Polluters" (TIPP) at [1-800-661-0525](tel:1-800-661-0525) or report it [online](#). Please include the date, location, species and how many sick or dead birds were recorded in your observation.

What is Environment & Climate Change Canada (ECCC) doing about avian influenza?

We are coordinating with the Yukon Government and the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative on the reporting and sampling of sick and dead birds. We will also be communicating with all Indigenous Governments and Renewable Resource Councils in the Yukon, and the Wildlife Management Advisory Council – North Slope. We welcome any guidance or recommendations on this engagement.

We encourage you to share this information through your networks, including the attached infographic. Should you have any questions or would like to request updates on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, please contact us at cwsnorth-scfjord@ec.gc.ca. If there is interest, ECCC staff can discuss this issue at the next board meeting, or at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Bruce MacDonald

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cc

Marc Cattet, Director, Fish and Wildlife, Yukon Government
Mary Vanderkop, Chief Veterinary Officer, Yukon Government
Catherine Elliott, Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Health, Yukon Government

Attachment: 1 Infographic