

AVIAN INFLUENZA – CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RACING PIGEONS

Updated 1st April 2022

This Code of Practice has been agreed between the RPRA, Defra, Scottish Government, Welsh Government, DAERA and the Animal and Plant Health Agency and is for guidance of pigeon keepers as to appropriate biosecurity measures.

Background:

Avian Influenza virus can spread from wild birds to your own birds by:

- Direct contact between infected wild birds and your own birds
- Indirect contact through contaminated faeces or body fluids of infected wild birds coming into contact with your own birds.

Pigeons can catch avian influenza as any bird can, but they play less of a role in the transmission of disease to other types of poultry, such as chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, game birds and guinea fowl.

Avian Influenza clinical signs in pigeons are similar to those in other poultry and include: swollen head; discolouration of neck and throat; loss of appetite; respiratory distress such as gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling; diarrhoea; neurological signs such as shivering; fewer eggs laid; increased deaths.

Part 1

General Biosecurity

1) How can you as keepers reduce the risk to your pigeons?

To reduce the risk of your birds becoming infected with Avian Influenza, you should take steps to avoid your birds coming in to contact with wild birds, or their faeces/body fluids

- a. You should focus on ensuring a high level of cleanliness (biosecurity) in your lofts, particularly if you also keep poultry – chickens, hens, ducks, geese, turkeys, game birds and guinea fowl – and should follow the advice in biosecurity guidance documents available on government websites.
- b. Summaries of best practice actions are available on each administrations websites which, whilst aimed at backyard flock keepers, is also relevant for pigeons and other captive birds. Copies of leaflets should be provided to members and pinned up at club/federation race marking centres and sale venues.
- c. You should undertake vermin (rats and mice) control to reduce their contact with feed and water for pigeons.
- d. Your birds should, where practicable, receive mains or treated water that is not accessible to wild birds or poultry to reduce the risk of contamination.
- e. You should ensure your baskets are as clean as practicable when you are using them to transport birds to other locations (other lofts, shows, sales, race marking). They should be disinfected regularly during the season.
- f. You should consider cleaning the feet of your birds before transporting them to other locations, particularly for shows, races and sales.

- g. If you also keep other poultry, including a few chickens and ducks ensure that your pigeons neither mix with such poultry nor have access to their food and water, in order to reduce the risk of spreading disease.
- h. Any vehicles / trailers used to transport pigeons must be cleansed and disinfected using Government approved disinfectant, between transports

2) In Outbreak areas: where an Infected Premises has been confirmed and your loft is within the Protection or Surveillance Zones surrounding this:

- You must follow any restrictions imposed. You may need to apply for licences to undertake certain actions – information on the restrictions and the licences will be made available on the government websites.
- In a 10km Surveillance Zone you can let your birds out for exercise, though they must not have an open loft to freely come and go which would increase the chance of wild birds entering your loft and contaminating it.
- If your birds are located in the 3km Protection Zone you will be able to exercise your birds (not with an open loft) once preliminary cleaning and disinfection has been completed at the Infected Premises and the initial epidemiological investigations have been completed to ensure there are no high risk contacts to your loft (for example workers, veterinary visits, feed deliveries, visitors, etc). If the time to complete the preliminary cleaning and disinfection and epidemiological investigations is long then if you think there may be welfare issues for your birds, then exercising may be allowed following agreement from an official veterinary welfare request and obtaining a licence to do so.
- If your birds are located in the 3km Protection Zone or 10Kkm Surveillance Zone you cannot train or race your birds until the larger Surveillance Zone has been lifted. Generally it takes around 30-40 days after the outbreak has been confirmed to lift these zones but may be significantly longer if further outbreaks occur in the area.

Bird gatherings including race marking centres (club or federation), race liberation points and shows are not permitted within disease control zones surrounding infected premises (including Temporary Control Zones, Protection Zones and Surveillance Zones). Alternative locations should be identified if this is the case. Any alternative locations should still be notified to APHA as normal, in line with the requirements of the relevant General Licence.

3) Avian Influenza Prevention Zones, where declared by the relevant Government Department, will have specific requirements which are likely to vary depending on the circumstances. You should consult the government websites for further details on requirements and restrictions.

When housing measures are in force as part of an AIPZ, birds will only be allowed out for exercise for up to one hour once each day. If the loft is not within a protection or surveillance zones, you may train birds as a single loft but must not mix birds from other lofts unless you have met the requirements of the general license (this would constitute a gathering and must be notified to the APHA 7 days in advance and comply will all the requirements of the relevant bird gatherings General Licence). You must not have an open loft that allows the birds to freely come and go, which would increase the chance of wild birds entering your loft and contaminating it.

Lofts in Protection or Surveillance Zones

Lofts in surveillance zones would only be able to exercise their birds for up to one hour per day. They would not be able to train alone, race their birds or participate in any other bird gatherings (sales, shows, exhibitions, racing etc).

Lofts in protection zones would not be able to exercise their birds at all until the zone is merged with the surveillance zone. They would not be able to train alone, race their birds or participate in any other bird gatherings (sales, shows, exhibitions, etc).

In a surveillance zone, if they were planning on bringing birds to their loft or taking birds from their loft (for example, young birds bought/sold at squeaker sales), they would require a licence to move those birds into/out of the surveillance zone. These licences can take up to 5 days to be processed. Licences can be applied for using the Avian Influenza Licencing Service:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-an-exemption-from-avian-influenza-disease-control-restrictions>

Zone	Exercising up to one hr per day	Single loft training	Multi-loft training/racing	Move birds to other Bird gatherings (sales, shows, exhibitions, etc)	Bird gatherings (sales, shows, exhibitions, etc) in zones
Protection zone	no	no	no	no	no
Surveillance zone	yes	no	no	no	no
Temporary control zone A (3km)	no	no	no	no	no
Temporary control zone B (10km)	yes	no	no	no	no
Captive bird monitoring zone	no	no	no	no	no
Restricted zone	yes	no	no	no	no

Part 2

1) Background to the general legal prohibition on all bird gatherings.

The Avian Influenza domestic legislation prohibits any fair, market, show, exhibition or other gathering unless it is permitted under specific biosecurity conditions contained in a General Licence published by the relevant Government Department.

Gatherings of pigeons which include sales, shows, multi-loft training, race marking and race liberations are only permitted outside of any disease control zones so long as the conditions of the licence are met by those organising such gatherings. The organisers in turn will impose strict biosecurity requirements on the keepers who attend with their birds. As part of the conditions of the General Licence, the Animal and Plant Health Agency must receive prior notification of all bird gatherings at least 7 days in advance of the event taking place. In Northern Ireland notify the local Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) at least 3 days in advance. More information and the conditions of the general licence can be viewed at:

England: www.gov.uk/guidance/bird-gatherings-licences

Scotland: www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza

Wales: <https://gov.wales/bird-gatherings-revoking-general-licence-gatherings>

DAERA: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/avian-influenza-ai

Gatherings (including of pigeons) are not permitted within any Protection or Surveillance Zones in place.

2) Notifying APHA: Organisers should complete the details in Appendix 1 and send to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). In England you should email it to: customeradvice@apha.gsi.gov.uk. In [Wales](#) contact your local APHA Field Services Office and [Scotland](#), contact the Inverness APHA Field Services Office. In Northern Ireland contact your local DVO.

3) Multi-loft training: This only applies where birds from more than one loft are brought to train together. Those organising training should notify APHA of the training collection and liberation points at least 7 days in advance of the liberation. In Northern Ireland notification to the local DVO is required at least 3 days in advance. Organisers should also follow the other terms and conditions of the General Licence, including keeping a record of those lofts that have trained with them on particular dates.

4) Single loft training: is not classified as a gathering and therefore does not require notification to APHA/Local DVO.

5) Race Marking: Clubs/Marking stations should notify APHA/Local DVO as above of race marking locations with a statement that between April (date) and October (date) gatherings will take place on a weekly basis at those sites for the purpose of race entry. It should be clear what day is used for marking (for example, Tuesday for mid-week and Thursday/Friday for weekend for inland/channel races). Registers used routinely for marking the birds entered into a race are sufficient information to keep a record of the lofts participating. These must include all birds in the baskets. Where race marking/liberation dates are changed due to bad weather or another issue, these should be notified to APHA/Local DVO as soon as possible.

6) Racing: the RPRa gather all the race programmes of affiliated organisations and notify APHA/Local DVO on a periodic basis (generally 10 days in advance of liberations). For other

organisations not affiliated to the RPRA, they should complete Appendix 1 in a similar manner (i.e. around 10 days in advance) and notify APHA/Local DVO as above.

Where race liberation points are changed at race marking or on the day of liberation due to bad weather or other issue, these should be notified to APHA as soon as possible.

7) Single loft sales: where birds are sold from a single loft location, (e.g. a stud or a dispersal sale), and no birds have come onto the location in the last 13 days, these are not classified as gatherings, but records must still be kept of birds and their new owners for at least 3 months.

8) Multi-loft sales where birds are kept at their owners lofts until transferred to their new keepers, for example, early season young bird sales and no birds have come onto the location in the last 13 days, these are not classified as gatherings, though records should still be kept of the birds and their new owners.

9) Multi-loft sales: where the birds are brought together to one location, written biosecurity advice must be given to all those bringing birds to or purchasing birds at the gathering, stating that the bird(s) should be isolated from any other birds (except those attending the same event) for at least 14 days and any signs of ill health observed in the purchased bird(s) during this period must be reported to a veterinary surgeon and such birds must not be mixed with any other birds until the presence of an avian notifiable disease has been ruled out.

10) General Licence terms and conditions are varied from time to time and differ slightly between governments. You should consult the relevant government websites for the exact details of the conditions. Generally there are conditions in relation to:

- i) notifying APHA/Local DVO prior to the gathering;
- ii) a requirement for a contingency plan (see Appendix 2 for a template)
- iii) cleaning and disinfection of cages, crates, baskets and solid surfaces and disposal of waste (including shavings and droppings)
- iv) recording of keepers and birds participating in the gathering which must be kept for specified period of time
- v) requirements, for sales and shows, to make biosecurity information available to participants and signed declarations from participants that birds are not from protection or surveillance zones (signed declarations are not required in Scotland).
- vi) A suitable experienced pigeon fancier should be appointed to check the health of all pigeons prior to bird being allowed entry into any gathering (including multi-loft training/racing/sales). Pigeons showing any sign of disease or ill health should not be permitted entry.

Further information is available on government websites:

England: www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu

Scotland: www.gov.scot/avianinfluenza

Wales: www.gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/ahw/disease/avianflu/?lang=en

DAERA: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/avian-influenza-ai

APPENDIX 1: Details to be submitted to APHA/local DVO

Gathering type		Race marking/training/sale/show/exhibition (delete as appropriate)				
Type of birds		Racing pigeons				
Number of birds		RANGE [e.g., 20-500] (depending on length of race and age of birds)				
Dates applicable		[xx April to xx September YEAR]				
Club	Marking location (address)	Organiser	Organiser address	Organiser Tel & Marking Location Tel (both required)	Organiser email (if available)	Marking days (e.g., Tues/Fri)

APPENDIX 2: TEMPLATE CONTINGENCY PLAN

(to be completed by the Event Organiser)

CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR:

SHOW/EVENT _____

LOCATION _____ DATE _____

Administration

1. _____ is designated as the show organiser and responsible record keeper.
2. They agree to keep a record of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of exhibitors for 3 months in case tracing is required.
3. _____ is to ensure that arrangements are in place to provide sufficient housing, food and water for all birds at the premises for the duration of a complete disease investigation.

Action in the event of an Outbreak of a Notifiable Disease

1. Any bird that has a suspected illness is to be reported in the first instance to _____ who will contact the nominated veterinary surgeon.
2. The nominated veterinary surgeon is _____ of _____ who is contactable by telephone on _____
3. In the event that a bird is suspected of having an infectious disease, the bird is to be immediately removed to the isolation area situated at _____
4. The isolation area is to be cordoned off and a strict control of entry policy enforced until such a time as an APHA/DAERA official or veterinary surgeon gives clearance.
5. All exhibitors are to be advised of the suspected outbreak of disease and all birds will be kept on site until they are released by the APHA/DAERA veterinary surgeon. Exhibitors should ensure that they quarantine their exhibits in the show from their other stock at the home loft for a minimum of 7 days. Should anyone thereafter suspect that their stock has contracted a notifiable disease, then they are to contact Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)/DAERA immediately.
6. Any birds which die during the event are to be placed in a separate individual cardboard box or bag and, once the suspected outbreak has been investigated and veterinary approval given, the carcass(es) incinerated unless advised to the contrary by the nominated veterinary surgeon.
7. In the event of suspect Notifiable Avian Disease, contact APHA/DAERA.

Biosecurity Measures

- All cages, crates or baskets must be cleansed and disinfected before travel to the event and be cleansed and disinfected on return to the home premises and before they are used to hold any other bird.

- A record of all attendees who bring birds or take birds away must be kept by the event organiser for at least three months. This must include the name, address and telephone number and details of the locations that the birds came from and went to.
- Any feed to which captive birds have had access, and all bedding, droppings or other material of bird origin which are left of the premises/at the site when the gathering has ended must be disposed of in a manner which does not present a risk of spread of disease, e.g. in sealed bags for normal refuse collection in such a manner that other birds do not have direct access to it. Any spillages outside cages should be cleansed and disinfected immediately.
- Buyers must isolate the purchased bird(s) from any other birds (except those purchased at the same event) for at least one week. Any signs of ill health observed in the purchased bird(s) during this period must be reported to a veterinary surgeon and such birds must not be mixed with any other birds until the presence of an avian notifiable disease has been ruled out.
- Arrangements must be in place for distributing biosecurity advice to all buyers, sellers and exhibitors.

Signed _____

The Event Organiser

Date _____