

Avian Influenza housing measures lifted

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Mandatory housing measures for poultry and captive birds will be lifted in England and Wales from Thursday 9 April.

Mandatory housing measures for poultry and flocks of more than 50 captive birds will be lifted from Thursday 9 April in England and Wales, the Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer has confirmed today.

The measures were introduced across the whole of England on 6 November last year to prevent the spread of bird flu. The latest risk assessment supported by the best epidemiological and scientific evidence shows that the risk of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) levels in wild birds and poultry has reduced.

This means poultry and other captive birds will no longer need to be housed and can now be kept outside. The Avian Influenza Prevention Zone mandatory biosecurity measures will remain in place until the wild bird risk falls further.

The lifting of housing measures applies to all areas unless keepers are in a Protection Zone or Captive Bird Monitoring (Controlled) Zone - these are areas where there has been a recent HPAI outbreak.

Bird gatherings, such as fairs and markets, remain subject to either a general or specific licence.

Deputy UK Chief Veterinary Officer, Jorge Martin-Almagro, said:

With the threat of Avian Influenza receding, birds can now be allowed access to ranges and outdoor areas.

Although the risk to poultry has reduced, there remains a risk that poultry and other captive birds can still contract bird flu.

I urge keepers to take steps to prepare outdoor areas before letting birds out. It is still essential that bird keepers remain vigilant and implement rigorous and strict biosecurity.

Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Richard Irvine said:

The lifting of the Housing Order will be welcome news for bird keepers.

It's important to get ready for lifting the Housing Order on 9 April, including to check and prepare ranges and outdoor areas. Whilst we are seeing risk levels reducing, bird flu has not gone away. Please continue to practice scrupulous hygiene and biosecurity to protect your birds.

Stay vigilant for signs of disease and report any suspect cases to APHA immediately.

Scrupulous biosecurity is the best way to prevent and stop the spread of avian influenza.

Birdkeepers are legally required to adhere to the highest biosecurity standards with an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) mandating strict biosecurity remaining in place in England, Scotland and Wales. This includes measures such as disinfecting footwear, clothing and vehicles and equipment before and after entering premises.

Those who intend to allow their birds outside are advised to use the upcoming days to prepare their outside areas for the safe release of their birds, as ranges and outdoor areas may still be contaminated with avian influenza virus. This will include cleansing and disinfection of hard surfaces, fencing off ponds or standing water, the removal of grazing livestock and reintroduction of wild bird deterrents.

As birds have been housed for several months, it may be necessary for birds to be acclimatised and gradually released over a period of days to minimise welfare issues. Guidance is available on preparing to let your birds outside again.

The public can check if they are in a bird flu disease zone on the map and check details of the restrictions for further advice and information.

The public is also reminded that you must register within one month of keeping poultry or other captive birds at any premises in England or Wales, further information is available.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/avian-influenza-housing-measures-lifted>