

Voluntary housing of poultry – FAQs

1. What is voluntary housing for poultry?

Voluntary housing is one of a range of biosecurity measures that may be applied by poultry owners in Western Australia to reduce the risk of H5 bird flu occurring in their birds. It is important that voluntary housing measures are applied in combination with other [poultry biosecurity](#) measures and that appropriate animal welfare is maintained at all times.

Voluntary housing may include measures to:

- reduce the likelihood of direct contact with wild birds or contact with the faeces and other secretions of wild birds
- prevent access by wild birds to poultry feed and water sources, or to treat water provided to poultry that may be contaminated (such as from dams frequented by wild birds) to inactivate the H5 bird flu virus.

2. What is the purpose of voluntary housing?

H5 bird flu can spread from wild birds to poultry by contact with infected wild birds, their saliva, nasal discharge and faeces (droppings), and contact with water or food that wild birds have contaminated.

Voluntary housing of poultry reduces the risk of poultry being exposed to H5 bird flu and other strains of avian influenza.

3. Why is the current housing ‘voluntary’?

H5 bird flu has been detected in Western Australia in a small number of migratory sub-Antarctic seabirds in coastal locations. Currently there have been no detections of H5 bird flu in poultry or in resident/native wildlife in WA.

The national Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (CCEAD), consisting of the chief veterinary officers in each Australian state and territory, has recommended heightened biosecurity, including voluntary housing, to reduce the risk of a H5 bird flu outbreak in poultry while the extent of the virus spread is better understood.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) can extend this advice while surveillance is undertaken to determine if establishment of H5 bird flu has occurred in wildlife in WA.

WA recognises that it poses practical difficulties for some poultry producers to enclose their birds while meeting welfare requirements and recommends that businesses seek further guidance on the impact to them from the [Australian Consumer and Competition Commission](#).

4. Does voluntary housing apply to all bird species or only poultry?

Voluntary housing only applies only to poultry species. In Western Australia, 'poultry' includes domestic chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks, guinea fowls, quails, pigeons, pheasants and partridges and ostriches or emus kept in captivity.

5. What scenario(s) would trigger voluntary or mandatory housing in WA?

In WA, the Chief Veterinary Officer may issue a voluntary housing recommendation for poultry while surveillance is undertaken to determine if establishment of H5 bird flu has occurred in wildlife in WA.

In the event of an outbreak of H5 bird flu in poultry in WA, a mandatory housing order may be implemented to increase biosecurity for all poultry within a defined area.

6. During voluntary housing, do poultry have to be housed 24 hours a day?

As housing is voluntary, not mandatory, the poultry owner will determine how long the poultry are housed for each day.

However, as the intent of the recommendation is to reduce the risk of H5 bird flu, the duration of time where birds are not housed should be weighed against the risk of H5 bird flu occurring in the poultry. In all situations, the welfare needs of the birds must be consistently met throughout the period in which they are housed.

7. Does voluntary or mandatory housing apply statewide, regionally or in a defined area?

The geographic boundary of the voluntary or mandatory housing is specified when it is issued by the Chief Veterinary Officer. The current voluntary housing advice is for all commercial poultry owners in Western Australia regardless of their location within the State.

8. How much notice will producers receive before voluntary or mandatory housing comes into effect?

Information on voluntary or mandatory housing is issued when the risk of H5 bird flu is increased and will be communicated as soon as possible. Whether the housing is voluntary or mandatory, it should be implemented as soon as possible to reduce the risk to your birds. Voluntary housing recommendations are not enforced – they are recommendations for the protection of your flock and the WA poultry industry.

9. How long will a housing recommendation last?

The Chief Veterinary Officer will advise the start and end date of the housing recommendation. Note that if the risk of H5 bird flu is still high at the end of the intended housing recommendation, the Chief Veterinary Officer may then extend the recommendation.

10. What types of poultry production systems does a voluntary housing recommendation apply to?

As H5 bird flu affects all poultry species, housing recommendations are applicable to all poultry flocks regardless of their production system (e.g. includes cage, conventional barn, free-range, pasture-raised). However, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) acknowledges that housing may pose more difficulties for pastured and free-range systems, while also noting that these systems are more exposed to the risk of H5 bird flu.

11. What is an acceptable housing structure?

There is no single 'correct' approach to housing poultry. Producers should focus on preventing or minimising direct and indirect contact between your poultry and wild birds. As H5 bird flu can spread to your birds directly from wild birds by contact with their saliva, faeces or feathers, preventing wild birds from accessing your birds, their feed, water, bedding and environment is important.

Regardless of the type of structure, poultry welfare standards must be met.

Refer to the [Animal Welfare Act 2002](#) and [Animal Welfare \(Poultry\) Regulations 2024](#) for specific details.

12. How do I minimise stress or manage behavioural issues that may arise in my birds when I house them?

Animal welfare must be maintained during housing. Actions to help mitigate stress and behaviour changes associated with housing changes include:

- Ensure sufficient space is provided regardless of the housing structure provided.
- Consider and implement any changes in food and water provisions (volume and delivery methods) that may be necessary.
- Provide enrichment items such as pecking blocks, foraging toys, perches etc.
- Item rotation, that is rearranging perches, enrichment tools and feeders every few days can keep the flock interested and prevent boredom.

If behavioural issues persist, consult a veterinarian.

13. What if I have poultry and no infrastructure to house my flock?

Where housing the flock poses practical difficulties, such as a lack of infrastructure, producers are encouraged to implement solutions that aim to:

- minimise direct contact between wild birds and poultry
- minimise indirect contact between wild birds and poultry (e.g. faecal droppings on open pasture or in the water supply from a dam)
- minimise wild bird access to poultry feed, water and shelter.

Some examples to consider include:

- using any existing fixed infrastructure and adding bird-proof netting to maintain airflow
- creating a covered range or food and water drinking area with temporary structures
- adding awnings and verandas to existing poultry accommodation
- positioning mobile houses together and creating a shared roof covering between them.

14. Will there be government grants for housing infrastructure?

There are no grants for building housing or purchasing infrastructure under the current voluntary housing advice. Poultry production systems and biosecurity precautions associated with these systems are business risk decisions that are the responsibility of the business owner.

15. Will there be compensation for additional costs and any losses from business interruption due to voluntary or mandatory housing?

Compensation is not available for costs or losses incurred by providing housing when voluntary or mandatory housing is in place.

Producers should consider the impact of an H5 bird flu outbreak in their flock on their business when weighing up the costs of providing housing that will reduce the risk of an outbreak.

16. Aside from housing, will I have to change other management practices?

Applying good biosecurity practices minimises the risk of H5 bird flu occurring in your flock as well as a range of other diseases. Housing your birds when the H5 bird flu risk is higher should be one of several biosecurity practices considered. For poultry biosecurity information, including establishing or reviewing a biosecurity plan, refer to the [DPIRD poultry biosecurity webpage](#).

17. If I comply with voluntary or mandatory housing, will I compromise my free-range poultry product label?

Find out more on the ACCC website here: [Free range claims for poultry egg and meat during an Avian Influenza outbreak | ACCC](#)

If voluntary or mandatory housing is in place for an extended period, and poultry are housed indoors beyond 90 days, free-range poultry producers may need to consider alternative labelling and information for consumers. For further information about product labelling, refer to [Home | ACCC](#).

18. What are the signs of H5 bird flu?

As an owner of poultry, regardless of flock size, it is important to be able to recognise the signs of H5 bird flu if it occurs in your birds. Infected birds may show:

- General signs of illness – lack of energy, not wanting to walk, eat or drink, being fluffed up, diarrhoea, unexplained deaths
- Respiratory signs – watery eyes, coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge
- Nervous signs – unusual head position, tremoring, weakness, not able to walk
- Physical changes – blue-tinged legs, comb or wattle, swelling of the head or limbs
- Egg changes – reduced egg production, soft shelled, or misshapen eggs

If your poultry are sick, do not move them from their housing or off your property. Call the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888. All forms of [avian influenza](#), including H5 bird flu, are reportable and anyone with suspicion of the disease has a legal obligation to report it.

19. How will I find out about a housing recommendation if it is issued?

DPIRD will communicate with the WA poultry industry when housing recommendations are issued as well as placing a notice on the [Commercial poultry tile](#) on the wa.gov.au/birdflu website. In the event of a H5 bird flu outbreak in poultry in WA, this information will also be communicated in media announcements and social media.

20. I have other questions about housing poultry. How can I find out more?

Questions about housing poultry can be emailed to: H5birdflu@dpiird.wa.gov.au