



# ask SAM

*Dear Sam,*

*I just heard an update on avian influenza in migrating birds. Now I'm worried about my backyard flock of layer chickens. What can I do to keep them safe?*

*Sincerely,  
Penny*

**Dear Penny,**

You are right to be concerned. There were several confirmed cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Wyoming last year, and this viral disease is still circulating in wild bird populations. There are a few key things you can do to protect your layers.

First, limit their interaction with wild birds. Compared to other birds, waterfowl are more likely to survive infection and become transmitters of the virus. Do your best to keep your flock away from ponds and stream banks visited by wild ducks and geese. You might also consider removing any songbird feeders from your property.

Second, be smart about where your boots go. A good biosecurity practice is to use one pair of chore shoes when you are at home with your birds and wear a different pair into town to avoid bringing home an unwanted disease. Shared equipment, reused egg cartons, and even visitors can be vectors of disease. Sanitize equipment often and ask guests to wear only clean footwear in animal spaces.

Finally, remember that adequate nutrition and low stress reduce susceptibility to disease. Ensure that your birds have access to fresh drinking water and

feed every day. To help reduce heat and cold stress, make sure that their housing has adequate ventilation and insulation.

If you experience rapid death loss or suspect HPAI in your flock, please report it to the Wyoming State Livestock Board at (307) 777-8270. Handle sick and dead birds with caution and take proper measures to protect yourself.

For more information on protecting and caring for your flock, check out the following resources.

- Backyard Flock Owners: Take Steps to Protect Yourself from Avian Influenza: <https://bit.ly/flock-protection>
- Best practices help ensure your chickens survive winter: <https://bit.ly/chicken-winter>
- Raising Backyard Chickens: <https://bit.ly/wyo-chickens>

Best of luck, and stay safe!

—Sam

Photo credit: Ellie Riske.