



2025–26 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and Other Wildlife Diseases Handbook

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Section 1.

2025–26 Operational Must Knows of HPAI

Assume animals on the Antarctic Peninsula are positive with HPAI, even with no symptoms, and take appropriate precautions.

10 or more deceased animals (mass mortality event) requires cancellation of a landing and immediate reporting. Take note of posture of carcass (body at odd angles, lack of outward wounds), which may indicate single animals who are affected and should raise cause for concern.

While closure of a landing is only expected in the case of a mass mortality, it is important that all concerning behaviour or deceased animals are still reported to IAATO so they can be shared with the larger Antarctic scientific community.

Additionally, please notify those who will be coming to the landing next or are in the immediate area of concerns.

Staff and visitors must stay more than 5m from all live wildlife and 10m from carcasses and symptomatic individuals.

- Make sure guests are prepared for disruption to planned voyage activities due to HPAI before they leave home
- Ensure biosecurity procedures are carried out to the **highest level daily**, between sites and regions
 - Onboard the vessels, it is imperative **ALL** organic material is removed from boots and other equipment before Virkon® S (or equivalent) is applied
 - Best practice is to dip footwear both when exiting and returning to the vessel
 - Make sure auxiliary craft and landed gear are cleaned between landings/activities
 - Large tarps recommended to place shore stranding equipment upon
 - All tarps, camping gear and shore stranding equipment must be disinfected after every use
- Small Boat, and other auxiliary craft, pontoons and flooring must be cleaned and disinfected between landing sites. Thorough cleaning of all auxiliary craft must happen between regions
- A Pre-Landing Assessment **MUST** be carried out prior to any landing/site visitation – minimum 15 minutes (combined water and land assessment)
- Minimum 5m/15ft distance must be maintained from live Antarctic Wildlife
 - Permits/authorizations or site specific protocols may require greater distances
- 10m/33ft distance must be maintained from carcasses and symptomatic animals
- Never pick up/handle dead wildlife
 - Do not walk through water in which a carcass is laying, or downstream of one
- Do not lie down, kneel/crouch, sit, or put personal bags on the ground at sites with wildlife
 - Do not use stool-chairs or chairs during vessel landings
 - Tripods are OK to use, however they may not be left unattended and photographer must stay standing
- Report suspected cases to your EL, IAATO, and home office within 24 hours. (Also see report form in FOM Section 02 Seasonal Information and Appendix 4)
 - Anything that causes discussion should be reported
 - Animals can still be infected and not show symptoms
 - Take photos and videos along with GPS coordinates to record what you saw and support further investigations
- Operators must create standard operating procedures (SOPs) for birds landing on deck and/or bird excrement on deck
- Operators must create specific SOPs for scientists they are working with. Operators are responsible for sharing their internal SOPs with appropriate personnel
 - Scientists should provide briefing to all staff related to project/fieldwork and make permits available. See IAATO Considerations for Operators Carrying Scientists into the Field.

Prompt Reporting helps the entire Antarctic Community track Wildlife Diseases

Equally it is important that those in the field share information of concerning behaviour or other site information amongst each other through the LSS Broadcast System

Section 2.

Biosecurity for Wildlife Diseases

The following actions should be followed for the 2025–26 season and are in addition to IAATO's standard biosecurity procedures. They do not replace domestic governmental regulations, permits/authorizations and are subject to change pending advice from experts.

Supporting Document in Section 02 Seasonal Information: 2025–26 IAATO Biosecurity Instructions.

Decontamination between Regions:

- A thorough biosecurity decontamination MUST be done between ALL gateways, the interior of Antarctica and maritime regions (including the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas), South Georgia, the Antarctic Peninsula, Deep Weddell Sea, East Antarctica and Ross Sea)
- Small Boat, and other auxiliary craft, pontoons and flooring must be cleaned and disinfected between landing sites. Thorough cleaning of all auxiliary craft must happen between regions
- Onboard the vessels, it is imperative ALL organic material is removed from boots and other equipment between landings before Virkon® S (or equivalent) is applied
 - This may involve extra staff to help clean any organic material (mud, faeces) off passenger clothing
 - Staff and Crew directly involved in cleaning organic material should wear appropriate PPE
- Best practice at this time is to treat footwear and equipment with biocide on [exit and entry to the vessel](#)
- Never touch animals, dead or alive unless you have a permit that specifically includes wildlife with suspected disease
- ALWAYS keep at least 5m/15ft from wildlife
 - If a landing cannot be made without maintaining at least 5m/15ft from groups of stationary wildlife (10 or more), the landing should be aborted
 - If wildlife chooses to approach people, take appropriate action to ensure the minimum distance of 5m/15ft is maintained where it can be safely done so
- 10m/33ft distance must be maintained from carcasses and symptomatic animals
 - It may be worth setting an exclusion zone with flags, ropes or cones while performing the pre-landing assessment
- Never pick up/handle dead wildlife
 - Do not walk through water in which a carcass is laying, or downstream of one
- Do not lie down, kneel/crouch, or sit at sites with wildlife
 - Do not use stool–chairs or chairs during vessel landings
- Do not leave any equipment or packs on the bare ground or snow, close to animal activity or faecal matter
 - A tarp is acceptable to store shore–stranding equipment on
 - Tarps, landing gear, camping equipment must all be cleaned and disinfected

Other Considerations:

- The 2025–26 list of camping sites focused on areas without wildlife can be found Section 02 Seasonal Information
 - This list may not cover all the camping sites ever used; if an Operator has another site they would like to use, it is permissible as long as HPAI and Wildlife Disease Protocols are followed
- Do not bum slide at sites with wildlife. Bum sliding, like camping, should only be done at sites without wildlife
- Sitting down at sites with no wildlife is allowed
- Operators supporting researchers who are authorised or permitted to be in direct or close contact (less than 5m/15ft) with animals should ensure the researchers are aware of the latest advice for mitigating transmission of wildlife disease
 - Operators must have SOPs with onboard scientists
 - Scientists should share their protocols and permitted activity with Staff, Crew and Guests
- Where staff must handle seabirds strikes, appropriate PPE must be worn including face masks and gloves
 - Staff should follow their Operator Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on using PPE and protocols on bird strikes
 - Operators should ensure this equipment is available for staff if operating in areas where seabirds are at risk of landing on ships

Section 3.

Pre-Landing Assessment for Wildlife Diseases

Assume animals on the Antarctic Peninsula are positive with HPAI, even with no symptoms, and take appropriate precautions.

10 or more deceased animals (mass mortality event) requires cancellation of a landing and immediate reporting. Take note of posture of carcass (body at odd angles, lack of outward wounds), which may indicate single animals who are affected and should raise cause for concern.

While closure of a landing is only expected in the case of a mass mortality, it is important that all concerning behaviour or deceased animals are still reported to IAATO so they can be shared with the larger Antarctic scientific community.

Additionally, please notify those who will be comes to the landing next or are in the immediate area of concerns.

Staff and visitors must stay more than 5m from all live wildlife and 10m from carcasses and symptomatic individuals.

Following the research of the last few years, it appears different species have different levels of susceptibility to the disease.

Experienced ornithologists, marine mammal specialists, guides, naturalists and researchers will be especially adept at spotting atypical behaviour in wildlife which can be integrated into a site evaluation prior to any visit. They can also assess if the numbers of dead or sick wildlife differ from what is anticipated for the time of year (e.g. normal chick mortality), site (number of affected animals relative to the local population size) or season (e.g. if food availability is expected to be low).

The following information is a guide. If an animal is show symptoms, it would be expected that several of these signs could be exhibited by different individuals:

- Neurological signs:
 - Walking or swimming in circles
 - Stumbling or walking without coordination (frequently reported in Great Skuas)
 - Abnormal posture, such as wings outstretched and hyperextension of the neck (reported in Sandwich terns)
 - Severe backward arching of head, neck and/or spine
 - Tremors and seizures (frequently reported in Humboldt penguins and South American sea lions)
 - Partial paralysis and difficulties in locomotion (reported in sea lions in Chile and Argentina)
 - Severe drooping of neck
- Other:
 - Penguins look sick – hunched over, depressed, lethargic.
 - Respiratory distress; Rapid breathing, mouth breathing, coughing sounds, sneezing, gurgling, rattling.
 - Specifically in marine mammals: excessive nasal discharge, cloudy eyes, conjunctivitis and/or drooling
 - Specifically in eyes of seabirds, including penguins: crusty, droopy, cloudy eyes. Excessive eye watering. Redness and inflammation (conjunctivitis). Repetitive, uncontrolled eye movement.
 - Unusual, sudden and rapid increase in the number of animals found dead between site visits;
 - Close grouping of dead animals

Section 4.

Response to a Suspected Wildlife Disease

Assume animals on the Antarctic Peninsula are positive with HPAI, even with no symptoms, and take appropriate precautions.

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We are still learning about HPAI and other wild disease symptoms, so any concerning behaviour should still be reported. Additionally, animals can be asymptomatic and still be infected, and should be assumed the virus is present at all landings.

If there is a mass mortality event (10 or more dead animals):

1. IAATO should be contacted immediately via shipscheduler@iaato.org or the Emergency number (IAATO will contact relevant stakeholders nearby)
2. EL should also contact Operator Home Office
3. The home office should contact the Operator's National Competent Authority; however it is important to note IAATO will also contact the Antarctic Stakeholders.

If HPAI is suspected:

1. Expedition Leader (EL) is the first point of contact and should be told first if HPAI is suspected.
2. If there are 10 or more animals showing active symptoms non-landed activities recommended for human safety and reducing animal stress
3. EL to contact IAATO within 24 hours via shipscheduler@iaato.org
 - ELs should also immediately send a short email saying there is a concern about a site to the rest of the fleet so no one will be caught unaware and monitoring can be continued – this can be done through the LSS Broadcast System.
 - After this the longer report form can be submitted.