



California Department of  
Food and Agriculture



United States Department  
Of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health  
Inspection Service

Exotic Newcastle  
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## **Exotic Newcastle Disease Outbreak in Backyard Poultry: Information for neighbors near affected premises November, 2002**

### **What is Exotic Newcastle Disease?**

Exotic Newcastle disease is a serious, highly contagious viral disease of poultry and other birds. After an incubation period of 2-15 days, the disease may cause high rates of sickness and death in susceptible birds, especially chickens. Other types of birds may be infected but with less serious effects. These birds, also called "inapparent carriers", may still be able to spread the disease. There is no effective cure and vaccination is of limited value.

### **How is it spread?**

The disease is easily spread to birds by sick birds and infected birds that may appear healthy. These healthy appearing birds may be incubating or recovering from the disease, or be of a species that is not as seriously affected by exotic Newcastle disease. Spread may also occur by people, and their clothing and possessions, and equipment and vehicles that have become contaminated with the virus through contact with infected birds. The illegal movement of birds has been implicated in past outbreaks. Birds imported legally are quarantined and screened for this serious disease.

### **When, where, and how did the outbreak start?**

The outbreak started in late September 2002 in Southern California. Although the source of the disease is under investigation, the virus closely resembles a virus that devastated the poultry industry in Mexico in 2000. In that outbreak, 13.6 million chickens either died of exotic Newcastle disease or had to be killed to stop the outbreak from spreading.

### **What types of birds are involved in the outbreak?**

As of early November, only backyard poultry have been affected. However, when backyard poultry are infected other birds on the premises have to be destroyed. This is necessary to stop the spread of the disease. **NO COMMERCIAL POULTRY IS INVOLVED IN THE OUTBREAK.**

### **What is being done to stop the outbreak?**

Surveillance and disease investigation crews are working in affected areas to stop the outbreak. To stop the disease they **must** have the support of the community so that they can quickly identify where the disease is present. Infected birds, and birds that may have been exposed to sources of infection, are humanely destroyed. This is the only way to stop the outbreak and protect other birds in the area. Owners of the birds are paid a fair price. The premises is then thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. It will stand vacant for a time and then birds can be reintroduced. There will be monitoring for continued signs of infection on the premises and in the surrounding areas.

**How is the neighborhood affected?**

Animal health officials are trained in disease control techniques and take great precautions not to spread the disease from the affected premises. If you live near an affected premise, you may see individuals putting on white suits, plastic boots, eye goggles, masks and other special clothing before they enter the premises. This is done to prevent workers from becoming contaminated and spreading the infection when they leave the premises. The humane destruction of infected birds and the cleaning and disinfection of the premises will be done as quickly and thoroughly as possible. The carcasses of the birds will be removed from the premises in a manner that prevents the spread of infection.

Animal health officials who have not been on affected premises will canvas the area and place quarantines on neighbors who own birds. If these birds have not had exposure to infected birds, they will be monitored periodically for signs of disease and owners will be told what to watch for.

**Can people get Exotic Newcastle disease?**

In **rare** cases, people in close contact with sick and dying birds, such as laboratory workers, animal health officials, and bird owners, may develop eye inflammation and/or flu-like symptoms lasting several days. These signs generally resolve without treatment, however, medical care should be sought if symptoms persist or are serious in nature. Many other viruses also cause these symptoms and your doctor may do tests to determine the cause.

**Is it safe to eat poultry?**

**Yes!** No commercial poultry is affected by the outbreak. **If** exotic Newcastle disease does occur in commercial poultry, disease control and meat inspection procedures would prevent affected poultry from entering the food supply. Also, exotic Newcastle disease is not transmitted to people through food.

**What can I do to protect California's poultry and bird populations?**

- Share information about the disease with your friends and neighbors.
- Anonymously report rumors of sick and dying birds to 1-800-491-1899.
- Anonymously report illegal smugglers of birds.
- If you are in affected area and own birds, get advice on how to protect your birds.
- Cooperate with animal health officials trying to control this serious disease.

**Related information available through the CDFA web site:**

**[www.cdfa.ca.gov](http://www.cdfa.ca.gov) Or call 1-800-491-1899.**

- Newcastle Disease: Information for Bird Owners
- Serious Poultry Disease Warning...Exotic Newcastle Disease in Poultry/Birds
- Biosecurity Guidelines to Prevent Exotic Newcastle Disease: Information for Bird Owners