



Guidance for dealing with sick birds or birds suspected to have died from disease

For backyard and pet bird owners across New Zealand

Sick or dead birds can carry diseases that cause illness in people. This guidance outlines practical steps to take if your birds become sick or die from disease, helping protect your flock, your family/whānau, and your community.

If your bird becomes sick

- Contact your vet first for advice.
- Avoid handling the bird until advised.
- Keep people and pets away from the sick bird.

Handling advice

If you need to move sick birds or birds that have died from disease, we recommend following these steps:

- Wear protective equipment such as gloves, eye protection, a face mask (well-fitted medical face mask if possible), closed footwear and covered clothing (e.g. long sleeves and trousers or overalls).
- Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose and mouth).
- Do not eat, drink, smoke, vape or use your phone while handling birds.
- Sick birds can be picked up placing a towel over the top of them, gently scooping them up and placing them in a ventilated cardboard box (for example, a cardboard box with breathing holes poked in the top and sides).
- Keep birds outside – avoid bringing birds into your house or enclosed spaces.
- If you need to transport the bird in a vehicle, put it as far away from you as possible. Where possible, place it in a well ventilated area (e.g. in the open back of a ute/pickup). If this is not possible, wear a mask and keep the windows open while you travel.
- With dead birds, use a tool such as a shovel or spade, or wear a plastic bag over your gloved hands to pick them up, rather than handling them directly.

After handling a sick or dead bird you will need to:

- Wash your clothing and any other protective equipment used with detergent. If possible, dry your clothes on a high heat.
- Dispose of gloves and any other disposable items contaminated by the bird by putting them in a plastic bag, taking care not to let the contaminated items touch

the outside of the bag. Tie the bag securely and dispose of it in an outdoor rubbish bin.

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Clean and disinfect any surfaces and equipment contaminated by the bird. Household disinfectant (e.g. bleach) can be used as per the label.

Wild birds

- If you see three or more sick or dead wild birds, report it. Call the exotic pest and disease hotline on **0800 80 99 66** or report online at report.mpi.govt.nz. If you report online, select the 'dead or dying wild birds' option from the dropdown list and then the type of bird you are reporting.

Look after yourself

- If you feel unwell after being around sick or dead birds, please seek medical advice.
- More information about keeping yourself safe from bird diseases can be found here: [Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora](#)

How to safely deal with dead birds and contaminated material

This section provides guidance for safely dealing with backyard and pet birds suspected to have died from disease, and contaminated material. In all cases when handling sick birds or birds suspected to have died from disease, we recommend following the handling advice in the earlier section. Incorporating tikanga or other cultural practice into your actions can be used if you think it is appropriate and can be done safely.

For dead wild birds on your property, it's generally best to let them decompose naturally. However, if they are in an area where people, animals or waterways could be affected, you may take action to move them. In this case, we recommend you follow the guidance below.



Possible management options:

1. Burial

If you choose to bury birds on land you own or are responsible for:

- Check with your regional council to see if there are any requirements that might apply.
- Avoid burying birds near natural water sources or where they could contaminate local water supplies.
- Bury at least 60 cm deep and cover completely. Do not bury birds in a plastic bag.

2. Household rubbish

If you choose to dispose of birds in household rubbish:

- Check with your regional council to see if there are any requirements that might apply.
- Put the bird in a plastic or other single use bag, making sure they do not touch the outside of the bag, and then tie it.
- Put the bag, with the bird in it, in a second leak proof plastic bag along with the gloves or plastic bag you used to pick the bird up with (taking care not to touch the outside of these items with your bare hands) and then tie the bag.
- Put the bag in your outdoor rubbish bin.

3. Landfill

If you choose to dispose of birds at a landfill or transfer station:

- Contact your local landfill, waste management operator or council to find out which facilities will accept animal waste.
- Double-bag the bird using the same approach as for household rubbish.
- Place the double-bagged bird in a leak proof container, for transport to the landfill or transfer station.

- Place the secured container in the back (tray/tub) of a ute or boot of a car. Wear a mask and keep the windows open while travelling.
- Clean and disinfect the container and the area of your vehicle the bird was transported in after disposal. Household disinfectant (e.g. bleach) can be used as per the label.

Disposing of large numbers of dead birds

For higher numbers of wild dead birds on your property that you cannot deal with, contact the local council responsible for waste disposal in your area.

Where to get support

Finding a sick or dead bird can be upsetting. Practical guidance and emotional support are available.



Your Vet

Your vet can offer advice on the health issues of your animals. They can talk you through what happened, what to expect next, and how to look after your other birds.



Healthline (24/7)

If the situation has left you feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or unwell, Healthline NZ is available anytime on **0800 611 116**.

They can offer reassurance and let you know if further support might help.



Need to talk? Free call or text 1737

1737 connects you with trained counsellors who can listen, support you, and help you navigate any emotional worries related to caring for your birds, stress at home, or the impact of losing an animal.



Friends, family, or community bird groups

Sometimes talking to someone you trust, or to others who keep birds, can help you feel understood and supported.

