

When the situation warrants it, Government agencies step in and issue bans. Such as last year, when outbreaks of the avian flu were climbing, there were Ontario Minister's Orders issued in spring and Fall, banning the commingling of poultry ([Minister's Orders \(gov.on.ca\)](#)). This spring, with outbreaks way down from last year, there have been no bans issued. Bird shows, sales, and swap meets have been reopened this spring. Government agencies also do not recommend (to do or to don't) on the topic of Urban hens. They say that they leave it up to municipalities. One could conclude that Urban hens are not a threat. If they were, agencies would at least put out a warning or recommendation!

Instead, Government agencies and our own Region recognise that many people do have urban hens and give recommendations for safe keeping.

Please see links from all levels of government above us and other knowledgeable boards.

[Backyard Chickens - Niagara Region, Ontario](#) "Certain municipalities have specific by-laws limiting the number of chickens homeowners can have on their property. There may also be rules on chicken coop construction, location, disposal of dead chickens and storage of feed. - *Niagara Region*

[How to prevent and detect disease in small flocks and pet birds - Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(canada.ca\)](#) "Fortunately, you can protect your birds and help keep them healthy. In addition, two certificate programs related to urban agriculture, the Sustainable Urban Agriculture Certificate and the Sustainable Urban Horticulture Certificate have been developed by the University of Guelph. Both of these certificate programs began September 2010." - *Canadian Food Inspection Agency*

[Urban Agriculture: Livestock and Poultry - Information for Municipalities \(gov.on.ca\)](#) "Growing your own food can be very rewarding and many people are looking at the opportunities they have right in their own backyards." - *Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs*

[Raise healthy small flock poultry | ontario.ca](#) "Many people in Ontario own backyard chickens" - *Ontario Government*

[Raising Backyard Chickens — Poultry Industry Council](#) Webinar on owning backyard chickens. Covers animal health and biosecurity as well as other aspects of hen keeping. "Many municipalities in Canada approve the growing of chickens" - *Poultry Industry Council (Canada)*

We sent an email to Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, to ask why Ontario outbreaks (see Numbers, below) were down this year, what they recommended for Urban backyard chickens and how many outbreaks have been in small flocks vs. commercial. These are the responses we received from Jennifer Van Gerwen.

"Hi Ms. De Fazio

Disease outbreaks depend on multiple factors and cannot always be accurately predicted, but biosecurity enhancements undertaken by the poultry industry in combination with provincial and federal government activities, including time-limited restrictions and zoning have certainly played a strong role in reducing the number compared to last year.

People wishing to have backyard chickens should consult with their local municipality – as you have been doing - as decisions to allow backyard chickens are regulated through municipal by-law.

On the CFIA's avian influenza page, under Investigations and Orders, if you select 'Ontario' it gives you a list of all the infected premises (IPs) detected during the latest outbreak, with the first detection in Ontario in March 2022 through to the present. Under 'Premises Type' you'll see that the majority of IPs were 'commercial'. Those that were 'non-commercial' would include operations that are not involved in supply-managed industry, including but not exclusive to small flocks both rural and urban. While detailed information about specific IP locations is not available for privacy reasons, our records indicate that four of the non-commercial IPs of the 47 reported in Ontario were small flock. All four of these were detected in 2022.

As a resource, OMAFRA has outlined some considerations [Urban Agriculture: Livestock and Poultry - Information for Municipalities \(gov.on.ca\)](#) to help municipalities as they consider developing bylaws for keeping backyard livestock or poultry.

The Poultry Industry Council also provides [Raising Backyard Chickens — Poultry Industry Council](#), relevant to poultry production in Ontario including backyard producers.

I hope this is helpful.

Jennifer Van Gerwen (she/her) ([hear name](#))

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Numbers! Obtained from [Status of ongoing avian influenza response by province - Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(canada.ca\)](#)

Yes, you are reading this right, number of outbreaks are way down this spring!! As Jennifer Van Gerwen (above) said, there could be many factors as to why, but heightened biosecurity, restrictions and education are part of it. It could also be a natural trend (see graph of outbreaks for last 15 years). Some years could just be worse than others. As below, the outbreaks in non-commercial flocks are less than half than that of commercial. The definition of non-commercial flocks: "Birds raised in smaller flocks of fewer than 300 for producing or selling their products locally for limited sales or for breeding for these purposes."

Year of 2022

Spring of 2022 there were 26 poultry outbreaks in Ontario. (March-May)

Summer 2022 there were 0 poultry outbreaks in Ontario (June-August)

Fall 2022 there were 17 poultry outbreaks in Ontario (Sep-Dec)

2022 had total of 43 poultry outbreaks in Ontario. It prompted Minister's order of Ontario wide ban on commingling of poultry from April 9th through May 20th and Sep 23rd through Nov 21st.

29 of the above cases were commercial poultry farms.

14 were non commercial. 4 of these non-commercial outbreaks were in small flocks. No record is available to show how many of those 4 were urban or rural.

Year of 2023

Spring 2023 there have been 4 poultry outbreaks in Ontario (March-present)

There were not enough cases to prompt any Minister's orders.

3 of these cases were commercial farms. 1 was a non-commercial flock. No record available to show if this 1 was rural or urban.

From searches on the World Health Organization web site on Avian Flu, "Aquatic birds are the primary, silent reservoir and impossible to eradicate." In a news article, The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) said it believes migratory birds are responsible for the outbreaks in small and commercial poultry flocks. This coincides with the Ontario outbreaks occurring in spring and Fall months when these birds are on the move. In the months of June, July and August, there have been virtually no outbreaks. So as such, water ways are high risk areas. Luckily, urban Fonthill does not have any waterways that are very close to us.

Like Covid, Avian flu will likely become endemic in our wild bird population and will be something we have to learn to manage and live with.

"The best protection for everybody to keep all the flocks in the province safe is biosecurity. That is our best line of defence." Katie Lowe, executive director of the B.C. Egg Marketing Board. Lowe says chicken owners should make sure their flocks are kept apart from wild birds and other animals under roof, with chicken wire or netting.

Teryn Girard, is a veterinarian working in Red Deer and Lethbridge. Recently, the City of Calgary's new urban hen licensing program began. Girard says it's possible the outbreak could dissuade some people from getting into what is a growing hobby, but even with the spread she believes backyard chickens can still be safely managed.

It is understandable that commercial poultry farmers fear this virus. However, there are resources in place to help them if the flu gets by their strict biosecurity measures.

Farms can apply for compensation [Animal health compensation – what to expect when an animal is ordered destroyed - Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(canada.ca\)](#) through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency after a loss due to avian flu. This means that it may not be a complete loss for the farmer. Other financial assistance may be available through programs administered by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), and, in some cases, provincial or territorial governments.

Within avian flu restricted zones, large farms can apply for permit to move their poultry to allow them to still sell their birds.

[Avian influenza – permits and conditions needed for movement control - Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(canada.ca\)](#)

Our Pelham group of supporters also must ask, to what extent are commercial poultry farmers responsible for their own biosecurity and safety of their flock? Contained urban hens would not be a direct or even a likely-indirect source of infection for them. They must assume that avian flu virus is everywhere! This spring, the 4 outbreaks in Ontario have been geographically separate, perhaps a good indication that the outbreaks were contained and not spreading from neighbor to neighbor.

There is no proof that outbreaks at commercial farms are increased because of urban hens. The comment in a recent news article that suggested otherwise, was speculation.

If avian flu is a huge concern, then important details were left out of the proposed bylaw, that was approved by the Agricultural Committee. Experts on the avian flu, recommend keeping chickens under a roofed run, especially during spring and fall migration of wild birds. As well, all poultry owners in Pelham, should have to have some sort of education on biosecurity as a prerequisite to obtaining a licence! We feel that the avian flu was pinned on urban Fonthill, as an excuse to omit us, as for lots of 30 x 100 metres or larger, or for agricultural zoned land, there was little thought given to biosecurity.

As a group of supporters for urban hens in pelham, it is our belief that Avian flu does not specifically target urban areas. Rural hens are just as likely to get the illness. So, excluding urban hens in Fonthill only, does not make sense to us.

News articles like to publish the astoundingly high number of poultry deaths, due to the avian flu. In the millions. Naturally, if a commercial farm or two gets infected, the deaths can be in the hundreds of thousands, because so many birds are in one place. These numbers only speak to the high volume of birds commercial farms own. Not to the number of outbreaks in a year or season, or why the outbreaks happened.

As per safety measures, all poultry owners and veterinarians are legally required to report suspected cases to Canada Food Inspection Agency, so that cases can quickly be contained.

When there are no government restrictions in place, the town of Pelham has forced some people to rehome their poultry. From the avian flu perspective, if hens are currently housed responsibly, staying in place is the safest option. These rehomed birds do not disappear. They most likely go to rural Pelham or neighboring cities where they are at varying degrees of risk, depending on how they are housed.

Instead of banning a small number of hens in a small urban community, could the Town of Pelham help slow the spread of the flu by educating? During peak times, increase biosecurity, not attracting wild birds or animals, keeping hens under a roofed area?

Contrary to what was said in a recent news article, urban people are capable of learning how to keep hens healthy. There are many resources available. CFIA has videos posters and more.

[How to prevent and detect disease in small flocks and pet birds - Canadian Food Inspection Agency \(canada.ca\)](#) Many urban people have lived on farms or have education too. A license system

would require them to read or watch educational information and comply with certain rules.

"Keeping Your Birds Healthy - Biosecurity Basics for Small Flocks"

This initiative was developed by the University of Guelph, the Poultry Industry Council and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to provide information and expertise to improve bird health and welfare and on-farm biosecurity. The website includes fact sheets on a wide number of topics including bird health, flock management, production, etc. Hardcopies of all resources can be ordered through the website or by calling OMAFRA's toll free Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300.

A tendency to happen in small urban flocks, is that owners name each hen. They become intimately familiar with each bird's personality and habits. They become attached to their hens, just as they would any other pet. If any bird was feeling unwell, it would be spotted immediately or in the first few hours. And they would consult with a vet or do research to learn what needed to be done, as they do not want to lose their loved pet! They would be amazed at the new connection and understanding of what goes into the making of an egg. The average person would have some sort of education in some background, that could be applied. Rather it be healthcare, animal care, construction or technology, they all could apply to different areas of chicken care.

Ontario Cities that allow urban chickens:

We will start with the most recent new city to allow urban hens, Orillia! Approved March, 2023, at the same time two other Ontario cities elected to not approve or continue urban hens. So, to say that other municipalities are discontinuing or not allowing – there are more continuing to allow and approving them.

Orillia [Eggciting news: Council to allow backyard chickens throughout city - Orillia News \(orilliamatters.com\)](https://orilliamatters.com/news/eggciting-news-council-to-allow-backyard-chickens-throughout-city)

Caledon, Ontario [Animal Care and Control By-law 2019-43 \(caledon.ca\)](https://caledon.ca/animal-care-and-control-by-law-2019-43)

Quinte West, Ontario [Animals + pets - The City of Quinte West](https://quintewest.ca/animals-pets)

Kingston, Ontario [Back yard chickens a growing trend in Kingston | CTV News](#)

Waterloo, Ontario [Animals and pets - City of Waterloo](#)

Niagara Falls, Ontario [No web link available](#)

Kitchener, Ontario [Backyard chickens - City of Kitchener](#)

Brampton, Ontario [10 things you didn't know about owning pet chickens in Brampton \(bramptonguardian.com\)](#)

Halton Hills, Ontario [Urban Hens and Backyard Chickens - Halton Hills](#)

Guelph [Guelph's Rules Regarding Urban Chicken Coops | SV Law | SV Law](#)

Kawartha Lakes [Kawartha Lakes launches Backyard Chicken Coop Pilot Project - City of Kawartha Lakes](#)

Norfolk [Backyard Chickens - Government - Norfolk County](#)

Orangeville [Hen Registration - Town of Orangeville](#)

Selwyn Township [Backyard chickens find favour in Selwyn Township \(thepeterboroughexaminer.com\)](#)

Newmarket [Urban Hens \(newmarket.ca\)](#)

Meaford [Backyard Chickens - Municipality of Meaford](#)

Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph all allow urban hens. We imagine those cities, must have an abundance of knowledge accessible to them about the flu and urban hens.

Outside of Ontario:

Edmonton [Urban Hens Program | City of Edmonton](#)

Vancouver [Backyard hens | City of Vancouver](#)

Victoria [Backyard Chickens | Animal Control Services \(vacs.ca\)](#)

Kelowna [What it's like to have backyard chickens in the Okanagan \(VIDEO\) \(kelownanow.com\)](#)

Surrey [Backyard Chickens | City of Surrey](#)

Gatineau [Cooped-up Gatineau residents flocking to new hobby: backyard chickens | CBC News](#)

Moncton [Moncton's backyard chicken bylaw draws little interest | CBC News](#)

Whitehorse [Backyard chickens allowed in Whitehorse | CBC News](#)

Fredericton [Fredericton approves backyard chicken bylaw | CBC News](#)

Saint John [Backyard chickens now allowed in Saint John | CBC News](#)

Other Interesting Avian flu Information Found in our Searches (lets keep pigs away from birds!)...

"If a pig gets infected with a strain of human flu, and a strain of bird flu, they can essentially shuffle their viral genes and make new viruses," said Rasmussen. "And that, in fact, is how several pandemics throughout history have occurred ... a sort of a middleman or a 'middle pig' between these two species to further transmission of new viruses that might arise."

"The damage avian flu does to poultry flocks is utterly immaterial to the flu's success. From its perspective, every chicken on the planet could disappear tomorrow and avian flu would continue to thrive. "

"Do not need to own chickens to be a transmitter. By visiting St John's conservations area, one could pick up the virus on their shoes, bring home to their backyard or to any other place."

"Being the dark sky bylaw is being discussed lately, we would also like to point out that urban hens do not add to light pollution."

David Waltner-Toews is a veterinary epidemiologist and university professor at the University of Guelph. He was founding president of Veterinarians without Borders – Canada, and a founding member of Communities of Practice for Ecosystem Approaches to Health in Canada. He is a specialist in food and water born diseases, zoonoses and infectious diseases transferred from animals to humans.

He is the author of many books and articles of science including; *On Pandemics: Deadly Diseases from Bubonic Plague to Coronavirus*; *The Origin of Feces: What Excrement Tells Us About Evolution, Ecology and a Sustainable Society*; *Eat the Beetles: An Exploration into our Conflicted Relationship with Insects and Food*, *Sex and Salmonella: Why Our Food Is Making Us Sick*; *The Ecosystem Approach: Complexity, Uncertainty and Managing for Sustainability*; *The Chickens Fight Back: Pandemic Panics and Deadly Diseases that Jump from Animals to Humans*; *A Conspiracy of Chickens: a memoir*; *Ecosystem Sustainability and Health: a practical approach*.

His books have won awards in the US and Canada, and have been published in Japanese, French, Chinese and Arabic.

- *2007 Finalist, Canadian Science Writers' Association Book Award, for Chickens Fight Back*
- *2014 Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Eco-Health*
- *2014 Silver Medal, Independent Publisher Book Awards (Environment/ ecology/ nature)*
- *2014 Finalist, Canadian Science Writers' Book Award for The Origin of Feces*

- *2019 Covetrus International Veterinary Community Service Award “veterinarians who have exhibited exceptional acts of valour and commitment in the face of adversity to service the community.”*
- *2022 Appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada for his “leadership and expertise in ecosystem approaches to health, and for supporting development worldwide.”*

These are David Waltner-Toews thoughts on urban chickens:

[Could backyard chickens cause the next pandemic? - Shaye Ganam | Podcast on Spotify](#)

[Opinion: Could my backyard chickens cause the next pandemic? - The Globe and Mail](#)

“The risks of disease transmission from small backyard flocks to people are no higher (and probably lower) than those from pet dogs, cats, caged birds, pigeons, and urban wildlife. The general scientific consensus is that the most effective approach to managing the risks related to backyard hens and HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) should be similar to that taken for those other (higher risk) pets.

Many of the fears associated with allowing urban poultry are rooted in a post-Covid sense of panic, a response which rarely serves public health well. Current understanding of urban ecology can enable cities to promote well-managed urban flocks, minimizing possible disease risks, and promoting the positive impacts of redirecting household food waste to chickens, proper composting, and adapting to climate change. Carefully managed, these small urban flocks are a wonderful opportunity for education and sharing of information about public health, food safety, zoonotic disease management, and animal welfare.

My great frustration in teaching epidemiology and food safety over the years has been that so few consumers have any realistic notion of local ecology or where their food comes from. Hence these consumers are vulnerable to a variety of charlatans arguing for fantasized zero-risk approaches to health in complex social and biological ecosystems. This results in the destruction of habitats which are essential for pollinators and wild bird populations. Rearing of poultry on a small scale within city limits can begin the process of redressing this profound ignorance.

If we do not make room for these urban entrepreneurs, we risk losing a very important educational opportunity, as well as food-rearing skills that will enable us to better navigate the economic, climatic and environmental instability our society will face in the coming decades. Cities like New York and Vancouver have recognized this.”

By:

Dr. David Waltner-Toews, Veterinary epidemiologist and University Professor Emeritus, University of Guelph; founding president of Veterinarians without Borders/ Vétérinaires sans Frontières – Canada; founding member of Communities of Practice for Ecosystem Approaches to Health- Canada. 2010 recipient of inaugural award for contributions to ecosystem approaches to health from the International Association for Ecology and Health; 2019 awarded Covetrus award from the World Small Animal Veterinary Association recognizing “veterinarians who have exhibited exceptional acts of valour and commitment in the face of adversity to service the community.” 2022 appointed as an Officer in Order of Canada, cited “for his leadership and expertise in ecosystem approaches to health, and for supporting development worldwide.” Author of more than 100 scholarly articles and textbooks, as well as

books of popular science including On Pandemics: Deadly Diseases from Bubonic Plague to Coronavirus (2020); Eat the Beetles: an exploration into our conflicted relationship with insects (2017); A Conspiracy of Chickens (2022) and The Origin of Feces: what excrement tells us about evolution, ecology and a sustainable society (2013).

Smell, rodents and excessive noise should be the responsibility of the owner to keep under control, as with any other pet or standard of home care. If any of these get out of hand, a complaint, a warning, and they are dealt with. If not, licence can be revoked. Just like cleaning up dog or cat waste, 6 or 7 hens can be kept clean! Managing food, building rodent proof coops and setting traps can keep rodents under control. Wildlife proof coops will keep hens feeling safe and quiet. Excessive noise would only happen if hens were scared. Their egg celebration song is short and would not break any noise bylaws.

We will end by saying - in regards to the dark sky bylaw, urban hens do not add to light pollution.