

New measures to better protect the poultry sector from future avian influenza outbreaks have been set out by the government today (19th March).

Under the changes announced, there will be new requirements for all bird keepers - regardless of the size of their flock - to officially register their birds. Currently only those who keep 50 or more poultry must do so, limiting the effectiveness of our national disease control measures. By registering their birds, keepers will ensure they receive important updates relevant to them, such as on any local avian disease outbreaks and information on biosecurity rules to help protect their flocks. This will help to manage potential disease outbreaks, such as Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease, and limit any spread. The information on the register will also be used to identify all bird keepers in disease control zones, allowing for more effective surveillance, so that zones can be lifted at the earliest possible opportunity and trade can resume more quickly following an outbreak of avian disease in Great Britain.

The changes come following the UK's worst ever outbreak of avian influenza, with more than 360 cases across Great Britain since late October 2021, including in a significant number of backyard flocks. If fanciers have already registered, there will not be a need to re-register and it is a process to enable the swift distribution of news of any outbreaks via email to all bird keepers. Pigeon fanciers amongst many others were invited to contribute. The consultation has been completed and changes decided upon. The new requirements will be effective as of 1st October 2024 - this means that all bird owners including pigeon fanciers will need to register. The only exceptions being "caged birds kept inside a domestic dwelling, such as parrot, canary or budgie, which never leaves the property other than to visit a vet or another short term period".

So do not panic, this is all being driven by the continuing global problem due to infections with Avian Influenza. Hopefully, this new regulation will mean that we will have less poultry outbreaks and less interference with racing. If you go to register now, you will see that there are still two options. One for keepers with 50 or more birds and one, voluntary, for less than 50. This may be confusing and I have the following clear explanation: "the requirements will be set out in legislation shortly – they will come into force on 1st September 2024, meaning that by 1st October 2024 owners in England and Wales will need to have signed up. We are encouraging them to do so ahead of 1 Sep on a voluntary basis, while it is still voluntary. For Scotland, keepers should register from 1st September 2024 when there will be a new Scottish Kept Bird Register in place."

**Chris Sutton**

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**YOU DO NOT NEED TO DO ANYTHING IF YOU HAVE A CPH NUMBER.**