Movement restrictions and contingency planning

Movement restrictions imposed upon poultry may become necessary in order to bring a notifiable disease outbreak under control. These could be for diseases of poultry and also those that do not affecting poultry directly.

This guidance summarises the issues which poultry producers in movement-restricted areas may need to address in order to minimise welfare problems to their stock. Anticipation of the possible effects of movement restrictions and appropriate planning in advance are essential in order to minimise adverse welfare effects. Therefore, we recommend that all farmers should have written contingency procedures for managing their livestock for a minimum period of 6 weeks movement restriction as part of their general health and welfare plan. Different contingency plans may need to be prepared for different stages of the rearing cycle, and depending on the type of restrictions imposed. This will include effective contingency feeding regimes, developed as part of the general health and welfare plan, in liaison with vets, agricultural advisers and feed suppliers.

Responsibility for welfare of the poultry

Movement restrictions as a consequence of notifiable disease outbreaks, or other disaster management procedures, do not diminish the farmer's responsibility for ensuring relevant animal welfare legislation and codes are complied with.

Welfare problems that may be encountered

**Overcrowding:** Movement restrictions may mean that farms in infected areas are unable to transport birds for the table (e.g., broiler chickens or turkeys) to processing plants, particularly if these are outside the infected area. End of lay hens may be similarly affected. The direct welfare implications of this may be less severe because overcrowding due to liveweight gain is unlikely. However, it could result in point of lay pullets being retained on rearing units where overcrowding (and other welfare problems) could arise. Movement restrictions may also mean that hatcheries in infected areas are only able to transport day old chicks to farms which are in the same infected area.

**Overstocking:** This occurs as a result of interruptions to the normal flow of animal movements. This in turn may cause difficulties in maintaining suitable environmental control in poultry houses which can lead to increased risk of
heat stress (in summer) and litter deterioration. (Further advice is available in our heat stress leaflet at www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/pdf/hstress05.pdf).

**Inappropriate environments:** Birds having to stay in environments that they would normally have been removed from. For example point of lay pullets being retained in rearing accommodation after the onset of egg production

**Increased feed requirements:** This means that there is a possibility of shortages and difficulties in arranging feed deliveries

**Increased need for staff input:** There may also be a need for increased stock supervision, which may be difficult for the usual number of stockmen to provide

**Disposal issues:** Difficulties in arranging disposal of manure, litter and carcasses, leading to biosecurity risks

**Management actions to take to prevent poor welfare**

Consider the likely duration of the disease restrictions, based on latest advice, and review the actions you can take to minimise the effects of these upon bird welfare.

Potential solutions to consider are

- Reducing the growth rate of birds in order to prevent overcrowding.
- Providing additional and/or temporary housing on site.
- As a last resort, in order to prevent further suffering, ensure that suitable plans in place for the humane slaughter of poultry on site. However, this does not preclude the need to follow the legislative provisions of Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995, as amended (WASK). (These are covered in more detail below)
- Ensuring appropriate biosecurity procedures are in place. www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/control/biosecurity/index.htm
- Ways to dispose of a build up of litter and dead birds on farm.

Discuss your plans and the implications of movement restrictions with your veterinary surgeon and make any necessary changes to the veterinary health and welfare plan. Animal nutrition and ventilation specialists, housing and equipment suppliers and agricultural and business consultants can also provide additional advice and support.

Retain close contact with stock suppliers, customers for the birds (e.g. poultry processors) the State Veterinary Service and Defra so that informed management decisions can be made.

Ensure that all staff understand the implications of movement restrictions and are adequately trained in any new duties and procedures.

**Consideration of stocking density**

When movement restrictions are applied, immediate steps need to be taken to ensure that the stocking density within each house will not reach the point at which bird welfare becomes compromised. The likelihood of this occurring will
depend upon how long the movement restrictions are likely to continue and the stocking rate within the house when the movement restrictions are imposed.

For free range units, other factors affecting stocking rate will include a requirement within protection zones (within 3km of infected place) to house stock indoors during an outbreak of avian influenza or Newcastle disease.

Calculated stocking rates should be compared with the figures set out within the relevant Defra Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock so that an assessment can be made as to when welfare problems due to overstocking are likely to occur. All keepers are required to have access to the codes: [www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/farmed/on-farm.htm#welfarecodes](http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare/farmed/on-farm.htm#welfarecodes)

In making assessments of potential stocking density problems producers will also need to consider:

- Weather conditions - the risks are greater during hot weather;
- The standard of housing in terms of ventilation system, insulation etc;
- Any modifications that can be made to the ventilation system in order to withstand temporary higher stocking rates such as evaporative cooling, directing air over the birds etc.)
- Previous experience of how the house is likely to perform and the ability of the stock persons to manage the system

Where welfare problems appear likely, the producer, in consultation with SVS/Defra, and other parties as necessary, must decide the urgency of the situation and what measures need to be taken.

If birds cannot be moved off-site then the following options should be considered: -

a) Reducing the growth rate of the birds.

This may be an effective measure, depending upon how long the movement restrictions continue. On its own, these measures will be effective short-term. Any strategy to reduce growth rate must not in itself compromise bird welfare. For this reason feed and water must continue to be readily available. Alternative ways of reducing growth rates are:

i) The use of carefully formulated rations with reduced nutrient specification. In the case of broilers, a switch to such a ration by 2-3 weeks of age could delay reaching a typical 2kg slaughter weight by up to 14 days. For wheat feeding systems, increasing the percentage of grain in the diet could have the same effect. However, specialist advice should be sought to avoid creating welfare problems due to a shortage of vitamins and / or inadequate consumption of coccidiostats in the compound feed.
ii) Reducing day length, so that birds are less active and consume less feed. During hot weather, it may be appropriate to have the light period during the night in order to reduce the adverse effects of high temperatures.

If movement restrictions are prolonged, it may be necessary to implement some of the following additional strategies in order to avoid welfare problems.

b) Alternative accommodation.

On certain sites it may be possible to transfer some birds to alternative accommodation. This could be through either the use of other farm buildings or the provision of temporary accommodation. This may be particularly important for free range birds that will need to be confined during outbreaks of notifiable bird disease. You may have to consider the use of the “service area” of the house in some cases. Other types of temporary accommodation could be used such as polythene houses that could be rapidly erected on site, although these may not be suitable in hot weather. Temporary outdoor pens can be created from straw bales with tarpaulin covers. Another good alternative is to construct a veranda as a lean-to on the side of the poultry house. This should have a solid waterproof roof, preferably insulated, and may have netting sides where the mesh should be of a suitable size to prevent entry of wild birds. All temporary accommodation should be provided with litter. Provision of water and feed, especially the scattering of grain, will encourage the birds to use the temporary structure.

Although the use of temporary accommodation is likely to be considered only when there is a severe and imminent risk to welfare on the site, it is important that matters are not made worse by the use of totally unsuitable or inadequately prepared housing. Temporary housing is likely to be most suitable for older and larger birds. Careful consideration still needs to be given to the provision of ventilation, feed, water, bedding and light and to keeping birds safe from the threat of foxes and other predators.

c) Culling and Disposal of Poultry

Under the provisions of WASK, no person engaged in the movement, lairaging, restraint, stunning, slaughter or killing of animals shall neither cause any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering to any animal nor permit any animal to sustain any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering. All staff involved in culling of birds, even in emergency situations, should be appropriately trained in humane killing procedures, according to the age and type of poultry involved.

Culling of injured and sick birds and the removal of dead birds should remain a priority during movement restrictions. Frequent and thorough culling ensures that the maximum amount of floor area is available at all times for the remaining birds. Where “hospital pens” are provided for sick or injured birds it may be necessary to remove these to provide additional floor space for
healthy birds. In these circumstances sick and injured birds would require immediate culling to prevent any compromise in welfare.

If serious overstocking problems appear imminent, due to longer-term movement restrictions it may be necessary to embark on a more rigorous culling policy. Alternatively, a more general large scale slaughter and disposal scheme may have been established. Advice on this should be sought from the local Animal Health Office or Defra headquarters.

Other Restrictions

Movement restrictions imposed on livestock are also likely to limit other movements on and off farm. Separate advice will be available on this and of the possible implications of such restrictions. This could include movement of manures and used litter from affected units.
Appropriate biosecurity must be applied so that animals do not come into contact with any manure, slurry or litter from infected areas other than those which are kept on the same premises.
If movement of manures is not possible due to prevailing restrictions it may be possible to leave it in the poultry house, until such time as it is possible to apply it to land. As the movement restrictions would also apply to livestock, this should not preclude the re-stocking of the house. It may also be stored on the holding, but outside the poultry house. In this case it must be stored appropriately, ensuring that there will be no possibility of contamination of water courses or of affecting the welfare of the poultry in any way.