



**Letter from the California Department of Food and Agriculture
and the United States Department of Agriculture**



We would like to begin by saying that as veterinarians and other animal health care professionals, we are deeply committed to protecting animal health and welfare and relieving animal suffering. We have dedicated our lives to ensuring the health of pets, livestock and poultry. Additionally, many of us are pet owners, ourselves, and completely understand the personal bonds between people and animals.

The virulent Newcastle disease (VND) outbreak is very difficult for everyone involved, most of all for people who have lost birds. We recognize it is devastating to a great many of them, and we look forward to a time when we can work together to protect bird health when VND is no longer present.

We are all in this together, trying to accomplish the very unpleasant mission of humanely euthanizing poultry either infected with VND or at high risk of becoming infected. Everyone involved wants to stop this disease as quickly as possible, and that requires commitment from all of us.

While VND is not a human health threat, it is in many ways similar to having skin cancer. It is easy to identify the main cancer mass; however, cancer cells spread farther into the surrounding tissue, infecting cells even though they may still look normal. Surgeons must use wide margins in order to make sure the cancer is completely removed. We are using the same process to eradicate VND with margins based on the level of infection for euthanasia areas around infected premises. While +/-1K is a place to start, the greater the number of birds on an infected property, the wider the margin or euthanasia area. The use of euthanasia areas is a common method of eradicating disease in animal populations throughout the world.

The diagnostic tests that are currently available do not always show detection of infected birds. If a bird has recently been infected, it may be too soon for the virus to show up in these tests. Therefore, using testing to decide which animals to euthanize in areas that are already highly infected could cause this virus to continue to spread.

Based on studies conducted in the 2002 - 2003 VND outbreak in Southern California and the current outbreak, risk factors for flocks are:

- Proximity to infected premises
- Housing birds in outdoor cages/coops
- Flocks with more than 20 birds
- Game fowl on premises
- Contact with wild or other domestic birds including neighboring birds
- Flocks where the majority of birds are roosters

Many premises within these highly infected areas are linked due to:

- The movement of birds
- Fence line contact
- Loose/feral birds
- Objects or materials that can carry infection from premise to premise

For any questions please contact us at (909) 731-6367

May 21, 2019