DON'T PACK A PEST!

Help protect Antarctica's unique environment from non-native species

The Antarctic Treaty prohibits introducing non-native species to Antarctica. As a guest to the Antarctic, you have an crucial role in protecting the white continent's unique environment. Thank you for doing your part!

ANTARCTICA AT RISK

Non-native species are organisms that do not naturally occur in an area and are most frequently associated with human activity. They have both direct and indirect impacts on the Antarctic ecosystem which has been documented in many regions of the Antarctic.

Examples of non-native species and related items include, but are not limited to:

- Plants: Seeds, flowers, roots, leaves, dried plants
- Animals: Rodents, insects, feathers
- Soil: Mud, dirt, rocks
- Microscopic organisms: Bacteria, yeast

BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME: INSPECT & CLEAN YOUR GEAR

Inspect and clean your belongings before you leave home. This will enable you to meet biosecurity measures in countries you will travel through and is essential before boarding your flight or vessel to Antarctica. If you are trekking, backpacking, guiding, hiking or visiting farms before your trip, this is especially important.

Thoroughly examine and clean everything you plan to bring. Non-native species can hitch a ride on many types of gear including:

- Boots and shoes
- Trouser cuffs
- Pockets
- Velcro, fleece, and outer clothing. Bringing any clothing or equipment with Velcro is discouraged.
- Backpacks and camera bags
- Outdoor equipment, including research gear
- Hiking poles and tripods

WHEN IN ANTARCTICA / SUB-ANTARCTIC: PREVENT CROSS-CONTAMINATION

It's important to avoid transporting any species between regions within Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic. Always inspect your gear between locations and clean it thoroughly to minimise the potential to inadvertently spread species.

When traveling on a vessel and participating in shore landings, utilise the on-board "boot wash" station to clean and disinfect boots, clothing, hiking poles, traction devices, etc., prior to going ashore and when you return to the vessel.

The boot-washing station is a facility on the vessel, at the head of the gangway, or close to where passengers board the ship. It allows staff, crew and guests to thoroughly disinfect, brush and clean debris from boots and clothing, ensuring complete decontamination. The disinfectant should not be rinsed off but allowed to air-dry thoroughly on articles.

Non-native species can't always be seen with the naked eye, so please do your best to clean thoroughly.

Be careful when walking in areas that contain organic matter as this can be easily transported to other sensitive areas. Try not to put equipment on the ground. Anything that touches the ground, such as backpacks, will need to be checked and disinfected.

STEPS TO PROTECT THE ANTARCTIC AND SUB-ANTARCTIC

1. Clean And Check Your Gear between landings, camps and regions

This includes boots, equipment cases, day packs, clothing, and anywhere else that non-native species could hide. If you are moving between sites, camps or regions, clean clothing and gear thoroughly before leaving the site and use a disinfectant wash. Ensure the disinfectant dries on boots and equipment between landings.

2. Report a "Pest"

All non-native species are considered "pests" to the Antarctic environment. Tell your guides if you think you have found a non-native species. You guides will contact environmental@usap.gov to report any findings of non-native species.

3. Spread the Word

Share this information with others. We all contribute to the health of the Antarctic environment!

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IAATO would like to thank the United States Antarctic Program at the National Science Foundation for their assistance in creating this document.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS TO THE ANTARCTIC

The General Guidelines for Visitors to the Antarctic applies to all visitors and all activities in the Antarctic Treaty area[1]. All visits to Antarctica should be conducted in accordance with the Antarctic Treaty, its Protocol on Environmental Protection, and relevant Measures, Decisions and Resolutions adopted at Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCM). All activities must be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment and must have prior approval/permission or meet all the requirements of the relevant National Competent Authority.

PROTECT ANTARCTIC WILDLIFE

WILDLIFE

- The taking of, or harmful interference with, Antarctic wildlife is prohibited.
- When in the vicinity of wildlife – either on land or at sea, move or manoeuvre slowly and carefully and keep noise to a minimum.
- Maintain an appropriate distance from wildlife to avoid disturbance. While in many cases a greater distance may be necessary, in general keep at least 5m from wildlife on land. Abide by any guidance on distances in species or site-specific guidelines.
- Always give animals the right of way and do not block their access routes between the sea and land, nesting places or other destinations.
- Animals may alter their behaviour if disturbed. Observe wildlife behaviour. If wildlife changes its behaviour (standing when it was sitting, moving its head around alerted, start vocalizing when it was silent, etc.) stop moving, or slowly increase your distance.
- Stay outside the margins of a colony and observe from a safe distance. Animals are particularly sensitive to disturbance when they are breeding (including nesting) or moulting.
- Every situation is different. Consider the topography and the individual circumstances of the site, as these may have an impact on the vulnerability of wildlife to disturbance.
- Watch your step for eggs, chicks or nest materials of skuas, penguins or petrels.
- Unmanned aerial vehicles must not be used in the vicinity of wildlife.
- Do not feed wildlife or leave food or scraps lying around.

VEGETATION

- Vegetation, including mosses and lichens, is fragile and very slow growing. Do not walk, drive or land on any moss beds or lichen covered rocks, in order to avoid damage.
- When travelling on foot, stay on established tracks whenever possible to minimise disturbance or damage to the soil and vegetated surfaces.
- Where a track does not exist, choose your route carefully, taking the most direct route while avoiding vegetation, fragile terrain, scree slopes, and wildlife.

INTRODUCTION OF NON-NATIVE SPECIES AND PATHOGENS

- Do not introduce any plants or animals into the Antarctic.
- To prevent the introduction of non-native species and disease, carefully wash boots and clean all equipment including clothes, bags, tripods, tents and walking sticks before bringing them to Antarctica. Pay particular attention to boot treads, velcro fastenings and pockets which could contain soil or seeds. Vehicles and aircraft should also be cleaned.
- To prevent the transfer of non-native species and disease between locations in Antarctica ensure all clothing, boots and equipment are cleaned thoroughly before moving between sites and regions.

RESPECT PROTECTED AREAS AND STRUCTURES

ANTARCTIC SPECIALLY MANAGED AREAS (ASMAs) AND ANTARCTIC SPECIALLY PROTECTED AREAS (ASPAs)

- Activities in ASPAs and ASMAs must comply with the provisions of the relevant Management Plan and abide by any restrictions regarding the conduct of activities in these areas.
- A permit from a National Competent Authority is required for entry into any ASPA. Carry the permit and obey any permit conditions at all times while visiting an ASPA.
- Check the locations and boundaries of ASPAs and ASMAs in advance and refer to the provisions of their Management Plans (all can be found on the Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty website - www.ats.aq).

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS (HSMs) AND OTHER STRUCTURES

- Some historic huts have been designated as ASPAs and require a permit to visit. Visits must folow the provisions laid out in the respective management plan.
- Historic huts and structures can, in some cases, be visited for touristic, recreational and educational purposes. Visitors should not use them for other purposes except in emergency circumstances.
- Do not damage, remove, destroy or change any historic site, monument, or artefact, or other building or emergency refuge (whether occupied or unoccupied).
- Consult relevant ATCM Site Guidelines for Visitors for specific rules concerning historic sites, monuments, items or buildings and other structures in the vicinity.
- Before entering any historic structure, clean your boots of snow and grit and remove snow and water from clothes, as these can cause damage to structures or artefacts.
- Take care not to tread on any artefacts which may be obscured by sediments or snow when moving around historic sites.
- If you come across an item that may be of historic value that authorities may not be aware of, do not touch or disturb it. Notify your expedition leader or NCAs.
- A list of the formally designated HSMs can be found at the ATS-Website.

RESPECT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

- Some Antarctic stations may accept visitors where prior arrangements have been made. Obtain permission before visiting Antarctic stations.
- Reconfirm scheduled visits well in advance, or according to guidance provided by the manager of a station before arriving.
- In addition to these general guidelines, comply with any site-specific rules or visitor guidelines in place when visiting Antarctic stations.
- Do not interfere with or remove scientific equipment or markers, and do not disturb experimental study sites, field camps or stored supplies.

KEEP ANTARCTICA PRISTINE LEAVE NO TRACE OF YOUR VISIT

WASTE

- Do not deposit any litter or garbage on land nor discard it into the sea.
- No smoking except in designated areas at stations or camps, to avoid litter and risk of fire to structures. Collect ash and litter for disposal outside Antarctica.
- Ensure that wastes are managed in accordance with Annexes III (waste disposal) and IV (marine pollution) of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty.
- Ensure that all belongings, equipment and waste is secured at all times in such a way as to prevent dispersal into the environment through high winds or wildlife foraging.

WILDERNESS VALUES

- Do not disturb or pollute lakes, streams, rivers or other water bodies (e.g. by walking, washing yourself or your equipment, throwing stones, etc.)
- Do not paint or engrave names or other graffiti on any man-made or natural surface in Antarctica.
- Do not take souvenirs, whether man-made, biological or geological items, including feathers, bones, eggs, vegetation, soil, rocks, meteorites or fossils.
- Place tents and equipment on snow or at previously used campsites where possible.

BE SAFE

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS/ PREPARATIONS

- Be prepared for severe and changeable weather. Ensure that your equipment and clothing meet Antarctic standards. Remember that the Antarctic environment is inhospitable, unpredictable and potentially dangerous.
- Know your capabilities, the dangers posed by the Antarctic environment, and act accordingly. Plan activities with safety in mind at all times.
- Keep a larger safety distance from potentially dangerous or territorial wildlife like fur seals, both on land and at sea. Keep at least 15-25m away where practicable.
- Be careful where you walk as seals can lie camouflaged on and among rocks. Keep a safe distance from sea ice edge and be cautious when stepping over cracks in the sea ice.
- Skuas are very territorial birds and will attack anyone approaching their nests by plummeting down on intruders. If this happens, retreat away from the point when the attack started.
- Any wildlife, even penguins, can cause serious harm. Do not underestimate risks.
- If you are travelling in a group, act on the guidance and instructions of your leaders. Do not stray from your group as survival in Antarctica can be a matter of minutes (especially in case of acute hypothermia).
- Do not walk onto glaciers or large snow fields without proper equipment and experience. There is a real danger of falling into hidden crevasses.
- Be vigilant in the vicinity of calving glaciers. Breaking pieces of ice can generate dangerous waves.
- Pay special attention when climbing rocks and/or boulders, as melting permafrost with changing temperatures lead to an increased risk of avalanches.
- Do not expect a rescue service. Self-sufficiency is increased and risks reduced by sound planning, quality equipment, and trained personnel.
- Enter emergency refuges only in case of an actual emergency. If you use equipment or food from a refuge, inform the nearest research station or the National Competent Authority that has approved/permitted the visitors activity in Antarctica once the emergency is over.
- Respect any smoking restrictions. Use of combustion style lanterns and naked flames in or around historic structures is strictly discouraged. Take great care to safeguard against the danger of fire. This is a real hazard in the dry environment of Antarctica.

LANDING AND TRANSPORT REQUIREMENTS

TRANSPORT

- Do not use aircraft, vessels, small boats, hovercraft or other means of transport in ways that disturb wildlife, either at sea or on land.
- Avoid flying over concentrations of birds and mammals. Follow the advice in Resolution 2 (2004) Guidelines for the operation of aircraft near concentrations of birds in Antarctica.
- Refilling of fuel tanks for small boats should take place in a way that ensures any spills can be contained, for example onboard a vessel.
- Check small boats are free of any soil, plants or animals prior to the commencment of any ship-to-shore operations.
- Small boats must at all times regulate their course and speed so as to minimise disturbance to wildlife and to avoid any collisions with wildlife.

SHIPS[2]

- Only one ship may visit a site at any one time.
- Vessels with more than 500 passengers shall not make landings in Antarctica.

LANDING OF PASSENGERS FROM VESSELS

- A maximum of 100 passengers may be ashore from a vessel at any one time, unless site specific guidance requires fewer passengers.
- During landings from vessels, maintain a 1:20 guide-to-passenger ratio at all sites, unless site specific advice requires more guides.

[1] It is acknowledged that exceptions to the application of elements of these guidelines may be made for scientific and official governemental activities if the realization of these activities so require and if prior approval has been given by the national competent authority and the activity meets all requirements oft he relevant national authority.

[2] A ship is defined as a vessel which carries more than 12 passengers

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION ANTARCTICA TOUR OPERATORS IAATO ANTARCTIC AMBASSADOR

REDUCING WASTE GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS TO ANTARCTICA

BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

When travelling to Antarctica, there are steps you can take to reduce the amount of plastic and other waste produced. Waste is removed from Antarctica by ship or air and taken to ports outside the region for disposal, but these may have limited facilities depending on their location.

Your operator is working towards reducing single-use plastic in its operations. You can support their efforts and help leave no lasting signs of your visit by reducing the number of items you bring, use and dispose of during your trip. There are also steps you can take to stop trash and harmful plastics from ending up in the environment.

REFUSE

Say no to items you don't need such as bags, bottles, cutlery and cups.

REUSE

Extend the life of your belongings. If you don't need it, give it away.

REDUCE

By consuming less and using reusable items, you can help reduce the total amount of waste worldwide.

RECYCLE

Learn about waste recycling at home and separate accordingly. Look for recycling opportunities when travelling.

WHEN TRAVELLING

- Avoid using disposable cups, straws, bottles, food containers and other items.
- Do not throw any non-organic items in the toilet, including wet wipes.
- Make sure all your belongings are well secured when outside, paying particular attention to tissues and camera materials.
- If necessary, bring waste home for proper disposal and recycling to reduce strain on remote areas with limited waste management facilities.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP

- Travel with reusable items such as water bottles, cups, bags, cutlery etc.
- Use reusable, durable waterproof bags to protect your camera and other devices from the elements. Avoid using plastic bags for any reason, even resealable ones.
- Do not bring hand or feet warmers. Most are single use and wrapped in plastic. Instead, invest in good quality clothing to keep you cozy.
- Remove unnecessary packaging from new items before packing them.
- Choose eco-friendly alternatives when selecting your travel toiletries.
- Choose products with non-plastic packaging such as soap and shampoo bars. If you need to use plastic bottles and containers, choose reusable ones.

WHAT THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY IS DOING

The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) and the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) have joined the United Nations Clean Seas campaign. Together with our members, we are working to systematically reduce the use of disposable plastics and other items. Operators are also involving guests in beach clean-ups worldwide and remove tons of marine litter every year. Through information to crew, staff and guests, and through sharing of best practices, IAATO and AECO are involved in raising awareness and involvement in safeguarding the environment, at sea and on land.

ARE YOU AN ANTARCTIC AMBASSADOR?

Join our growing community by submitting your profile for inclusion on the Antarctic Ambassador World Map

#AntarcticAmbassadors
#LoveAntarctica

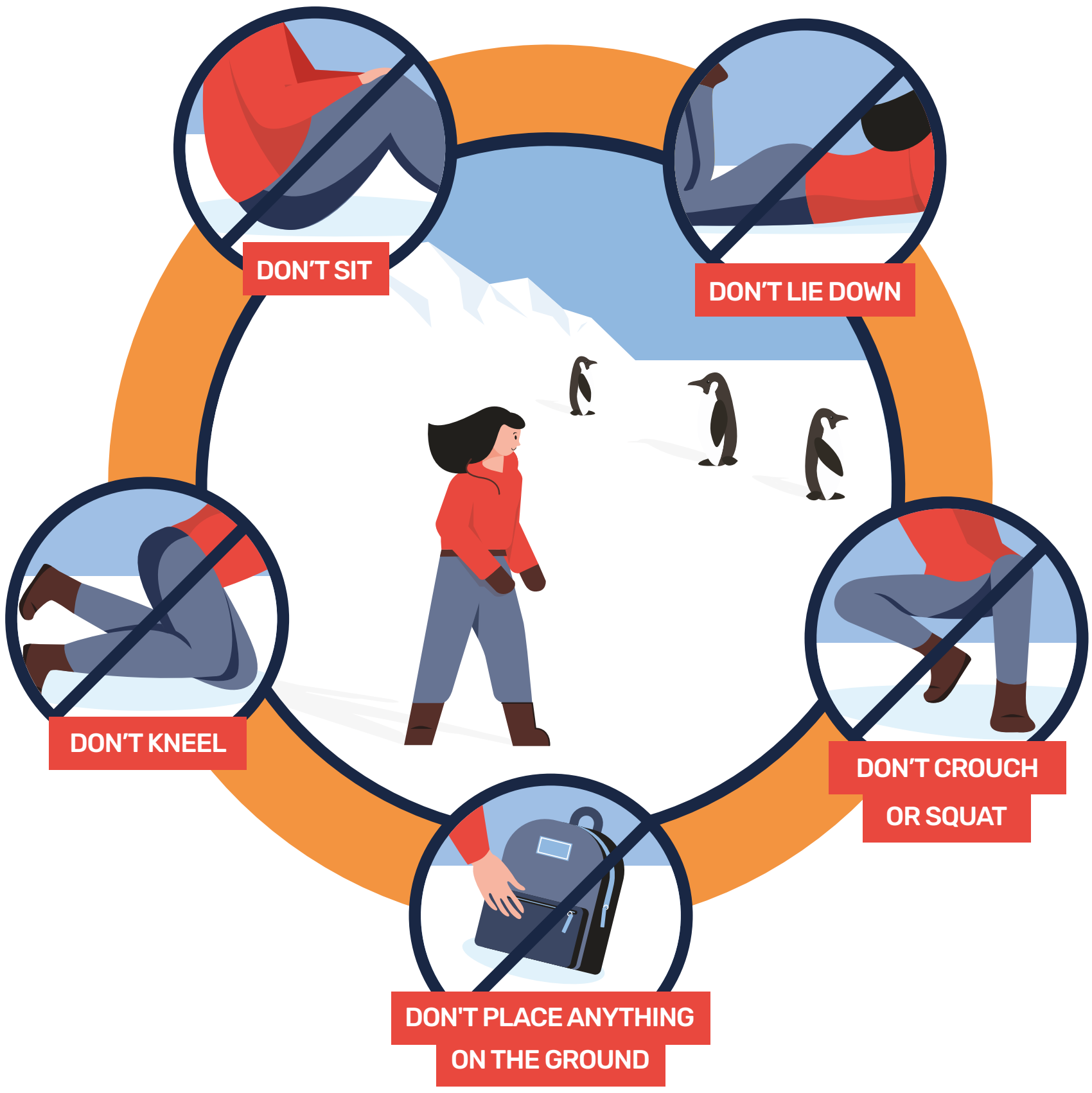
@AntarcticAmbassadors

@AntarcticAmbassadors

AVIAN INFLUENZA

HOW YOU CAN PROTECT ANTARCTICA

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE: MINIMUM 5M/15FT



Find out more about Avian Influenza and how you can prevent it being introduced and spread.

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IAATO 2026-27 Avian Influenza & Wildlife Disease Protocols

Since 2021, the increasing intensity of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 outbreaks has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of seabirds around the world. Marine mammals, including seals and sea lions, have also been affected.

In the Southern Hemisphere, avian influenza was first detected in South America in the spring of 2023 and confirmed in the Antarctic Treaty Area in February 2024. Additionally, while testing for avian influenza in the Antarctic, other wildlife diseases, such as avian cholera, were also detected.

The Antarctic community, from Antarctic Treaty Parties to scientists, National Antarctic Programs, and the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO), is concerned about the effects of avian influenza and other wildlife diseases in Antarctica, and the serious impact they could have on the local wildlife and human health.

IAATO members are committed to the robust procedures in place to protect humans and Antarctic wildlife from pathogens and prevent non-native species (NNS) from spreading to Antarctica. We will continue to maintain heightened vigilance regarding operations this season.

Here is how you can do your part to prevent avian influenza and other wildlife diseases from being introduced and spread:

Before you go

Before you leave home, ensure anything that may come into contact with the Antarctic environment – including clothing and equipment - is thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

- Use IAATO's Don't Pack a Pest guidance to assist you.
- If you plan to explore a gateway country before your expedition, consider using a separate set of clothing and equipment to reduce the risk of transmitting non-native species (NNS).
- Avoid visiting areas where avian influenza is known or suspected to be present before your expedition. If you plan to visit these areas, do so after your expedition instead.

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In Antarctica: Visiting Wildlife

Existing protocols, including daily biosecurity procedures and maintaining minimum distances from wildlife, are essential to protecting Antarctica.

In addition, it is required that you:

- Do not sit or lie down in wildlife areas.
- Do not place any equipment on the ground or snow in wildlife areas.

Your operator will keep you informed, and if in doubt, please ask your guides for direction.

Protecting Antarctica is a shared responsibility for all who have the privilege of experiencing this extraordinary place firsthand. By familiarising yourself with these protocols and putting them into practice in the field, you're helping to safeguard the region and its wildlife.

Thank you for acting for Antarctica.

Latest information, World Organization of Animal Health: https://www.woah.org/en/disease/avian-influenza/
Latest information, SCAR Antarctic Wildlife Health Working Group: https://scar.org/library-data/avian-flu.