

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Frequently Asked Questions

Updated April 8, 2015

What is Avian Influenza?

- Avian Influenza (AI) is a viral disease that affects all species of birds. It is caused by the type “A” influenza virus.
- AI viruses can be classified into two categories, those that cause mild to no disease in poultry (low pathogenic avian influenza or LPAI) and those that cause severe disease (highly pathogenic avian influenza or HPAI).
- Waterfowl are the natural reservoirs (carriers) of AI viruses. While the viruses may cause marked illness and fatality in domestic poultry, waterfowl often show little to no signs of infection.

What are the signs of HPAI?

- Some birds may exhibit flu and cold-like symptoms. Signs may include: loss of appetite, lack of vocalization, drop in egg production, coughing, swollen face, diarrhea and paralysis.
- Sudden and rapid death loss.

How is HPAI spread?

- AI is spread easily through droppings or nasal discharge of an infected bird, which contaminates dust and soil.
- People can carry the virus on their shoes, clothes, equipment and vehicles.
- Control methods are limited; therefore, it is better to prevent infections with biosecurity at an individual farm and regional level. Influenza viruses follow the movement of people and equipment and can only be controlled if everyone communicates openly.

Does it affect people? Can people get AI from eating poultry?

- The risk of human infection is very low. To date, the HPAI strains that have been found in the United States have not been detected in humans.
- Risk of infection is limited to people in direct contact with affected birds.
- All poultry identified with HPAI are prohibited by law from entering the marketplace.
- There is no evidence that people can acquire AI by eating poultry products.
- As a reminder, all poultry and eggs should be handled properly and cooked to an internal temperature of 165° F.

What is being done to prevent and stop the spread of HPAI?

- Early detection is the key to preventing the spread of the virus.
- Minnesota’s AI surveillance program has been in place for more than 40 years.
- Every commercial poultry flock in Minnesota is tested for influenza by the Board of Animal Health prior to going to market. Some smaller poultry flocks and live bird markets in Minnesota also participate in AI surveillance programs.

- The United States has the strongest AI surveillance program in the world. The USDA along with poultry industry partners are actively looking for the disease.
- In Minnesota, the Board of Animal Health immediately quarantines potentially-infected flocks and collects samples for AI testing.
- Once a flock is confirmed positive, the Board and the USDA work with the producer/bird owner to create a flock plan. The plan includes appraisal, indemnity and depopulation of remaining birds, carcass disposal and cleaning and disinfection of the premises.
- To meet federal requirements for HPAI response, the Board also conducts surveillance testing within 10 km of the affected farm and notifies all other poultry owners within a 20 km area.

What role do waterfowl play in the spread of HPAI?

- Waterfowl are the natural reservoirs (carriers) of AI viruses.
- Ultimately wild birds are involved as a reservoir but the specifics of how this virus got into these farms is an ongoing investigation. Owners of domestic poultry can use biosecurity to protect their flocks.

What is Biosecurity?

- Biosecurity is a term used to describe the procedures and practices that are followed by the poultry industry in order to contain or prevent the spread of influenza viruses in a poultry flock. These practices include isolation, sanitation and traffic control of people, animals and equipment.

What steps can I take to protect my flock(s)?

- Discourage co-mingling of waterfowl and domestic birds and poultry. This includes eliminating feed or water available which attracts waterfowl and other wild birds.
- Avoid on-farm traffic patterns that cross waterways. Wear appropriate footwear that can be cleaned and sanitized.
- Prevent access to surface water and the surrounding environment by poultry and prevent wild birds access to poultry feed, water and other environments strictly for poultry.
- Avoid the use of surface water for watering poultry unless it has been treated/disinfected.

What should I do if I observe signs of illness or increased mortality in my birds?

- Call 320-214-6700, ext. 3804,
- The USDA at 866-536-7593, or
- Your local/flock veterinarian.

Visit www.mnaireponse.info for additional information.