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# Questions and Answers

## Avian Influenza in the United States

### **Q. Does highly pathogenic avian influenza currently exist in the United States?**

**A.** Since mid-December 2014, there have been several ongoing highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5 incidents along the Pacific, Central and Mississippi Flyways. Cases in wild birds, captive wild birds, backyard poultry or commercial poultry have been reported in Arkansas, California, Iowa, Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, South Dakota, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming. Details are available on the [APHIS website](#). The HPAI strains detected recently in these flyways are H5N2, H5N8 and H5N1, but primarily H5N2 in turkey flocks.

### **Q. Can people catch these highly pathogenic avian influenza strains that are being detected in these outbreaks?**

**A.** CDC considers the risk to people from these HPAI H5 viruses in wild birds, backyard flocks, and commercial poultry, to be low. No human infections with these viruses have been detected at this time, however, similar viruses have infected people. It's possible that human infections with these viruses may occur. While human infections are possible, infection with avian influenza viruses in general are rare and – when they occur – these viruses have not spread easily to other people. These reports of H5-infected wild birds and poultry in the United States do not signal the start of a pandemic.

### **Q. How is USDA dealing with these HPAI outbreaks?**

**A.** The United States has the strongest AI surveillance program in the world so that the food supply remains safe. One in which USDA actively looks for the disease as well as provides compensation to affected producers to encourage reporting. As part of the existing USDA avian influenza response plans, Federal and State partners as well as industry are responding quickly and decisively to these outbreaks by following these five basic steps:

- **Quarantine** – restricting movement of poultry and poultry-moving equipment into and out of the control area;
- **Eradicate** – humanely euthanizing the affected flock(s);
- **Monitor region** – testing wild and domestic birds in a broad area around the quarantine area;
- **Disinfect** – kills the virus in the affected flock locations; and
- **Test** – confirming that the poultry farm is AI virus-free.

### **Q. Has HPAI ever occurred in this country before these 2014/2015 outbreaks?**

**A.** Incidents of low pathogenic avian influenza are commonly detected in domestic poultry flocks. Low pathogenic avian influenza does not pose a serious threat to human health.

USDA has experience responding to highly pathogenic avian influenza in U.S. poultry. Before these current outbreaks, there were only three high path AI outbreaks in commercial poultry in U.S. history – in 1924, 1983 and 2004. No significant human illness resulted from these outbreaks.

- The 1924 H7 HPAI outbreak was detected in and contained to East Coast live bird markets.

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- The 1983-84 H5N2 HPAI bird outbreaks resulted in the destruction of approximately 17 million chickens, turkeys, and guinea fowl in the northeastern United States to contain and eradicate the disease.
- In 2004, USDA confirmed an H5N2 HPAI outbreak in chickens in the southern United States. The disease was quickly eradicated thanks to close coordination and cooperation between USDA, state, local, and industry leaders. Because of the quick response, the disease was limited to one flock.

### **Avian Influenza and USDA's Role in Protecting the United States**

#### **Q. What is USDA doing in response to the HPAI outbreaks in the United States?**

**A.** USDA recognizes that highly pathogenic avian influenza poses a significant threat to animal health. Accordingly, USDA has safeguards in place to protect against and respond to highly pathogenic avian influenza in the United States. In the current response effort, USDA is coordinating closely with State officials (in affected and bordering States) and other Federal departments on avian influenza surveillance, reporting and control efforts. USDA also is coordinating with Canada on the HPAI H5 findings that are close to the Northern U.S. border.

#### **Q. What is USDA doing to help States and producers?**

**A.** USDA will continue to do everything it can to support states and producers. USDA will continue to coordinate closely with State officials and other Federal departments on rigorous surveillance, reporting and control efforts. At the same time, USDA will continue to work with Congress to ensure that we are able to provide a much-needed safety net to the poultry producers who are experiencing economic hardships as a result of losses due to the disease.

#### **Q. What does USDA do besides respond to HPAI outbreaks are there other systems in place?**

**A.** Trade restrictions: USDA maintains trade restrictions on the importation of poultry and poultry products from countries and/or regions where there have been confirmed outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza in commercial or traditionally-raised poultry.

Surveillance: USDA works with Federal and State partners and industry to monitor U.S. bird populations. Surveillance is conducted in four key areas: live bird markets, commercial flocks, backyard flocks, and migratory bird populations. Extensive testing occurs in live bird markets and commercial flocks. Additionally, birds that show signs of illness are tested. USDA and State veterinarians are specially trained to diagnose foreign animal diseases, such as avian influenza and regularly conduct field investigations of suspicious disease conditions. This monitoring is assisted by university personnel, State animal health officials, USDA-accredited veterinarians, and members of the industry who report suspicious cases. USDA and State animal health officials work cooperatively with the poultry industry to conduct surveillance at breeding flocks, slaughter plants, live-bird markets, livestock auctions, and poultry dealers.

Backyard flock biosecurity program: USDA encourages backyard and small poultry producers to strengthen biosecurity practices in order to prevent the introduction of AI into their flocks. Biosecurity refers to practical management practices that help to prevent diseases.

#### **Q. Is USDA doing any work globally?**

**A.** USDA is working closely with international organizations such as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Health Organization to assist HPAI-affected countries and other countries with disease prevention, management, and eradication activities. By helping these countries prepare for, manage, and eradicate HPAI outbreaks, USDA can help to slow the spread of the virus. Some efforts include: 1) Training

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sessions for veterinarians and poultry disease experts from H5N1-affected and at-risk countries to teach testing protocols; 2) Professional expertise and funding to help the FAO in Rome develop a new Crisis Management Center, to respond rapidly and effectively to avian influenza outbreaks in poultry worldwide; 3) Assistance to H5N1-affected countries, including laboratory equipment, reagents, and sample shipping containers to bolster AI testing and diagnostic programs; and 4) In collaboration with FAO and OIE, USDA has deployed expert scientists, veterinarians, and animal health emergency managers to HPAI-affected countries to test and diagnose AI; advise on surveillance and vaccination programs to protect poultry; and advise on emergency contingency plans.