

USDA Key Messages for Avian Influenza

Scenario 3: Highly Pathogenic H5N1 Avian Influenza Detection in Commercial Poultry

Educating the media and the public about the complexities of avian influenza as a disease among birds is one of USDA's primary communications objectives.

As part of this effort, USDA, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of the Interior, and Department of Homeland Security, have developed three scenarios in the event of a detection and/or outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in the United States.

The scenarios are:

- 1) a highly pathogenic avian influenza detection in the United States;
- 2) a highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza detection in wild birds; and
- 3) a highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza detection in commercial poultry

Each of these scenarios contains a series of key questions and answers about animal health, guidance for the public, as well as a summary of the actions USDA would take in the event of a highly pathogenic avian influenza detection in the United States.

Scenario 3: Highly Pathogenic H5N1 Avian Influenza Detection in Commercial Poultry - Key

- 3-1. In the event of a detection, what would USDA do to keep highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI H5N1) from spreading further?
- 3-2. If there were a detection of HPAI H5N1 in U.S. commercial poultry, what can we expect to happen next?
- 3-3. If there was a detection, what advice would USDA give to operators of other commercial poultry flocks?
- 3-4. After a sample is taken, when would USDA have definitive test results on whether it is HPAI H5N1 or not?
- 3-5. In the event of a HPAI H5N1 detection in a commercial flock, who would be in charge?
- 3-6. What could the economic impacts of an HPAI H5N1 detection in commercial flocks be?
- 3-7. Would you expect to find more outbreaks of HPAI H5N1?
- 3-8. Would producers be reimbursed for euthanized birds?
- 3-9. In the event of an HPAI H5N1 detection in U.S. poultry, would trade restrictions be imposed on the United States?

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3-1 In the event of a detection, what would USDA do to keep highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza from spreading further?

USDA would implement our highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI H5N1) national response plan to prevent spread of the virus. In the event of any HPAI outbreak in the United States, USDA would work with States and industry to respond quickly and decisively by following these five basic steps:

- o Quarantine – restrict movement of poultry and poultry-moving equipment into and out of the control area;
- o Eradicate – humanely euthanize;
- o Monitor region – broad area of testing;
- o Disinfect – kills virus; and
- o Test – confirm that the poultry farm is AI virus-free.

USDA has been working with governments worldwide to help slow further spread of HPAI H5N1. By helping other countries, we help to protect the United States. Our experts are assisting with education, eradication, and research overseas. We have dedicated tens of millions of dollars to assisting other countries with their response.

USDA is working to prevent spread of the virus from other sources. We prohibit the importation of poultry and poultry products from countries and/or regions where HPAI H5N1 has been detected in commercial or traditionally raised flocks (not in wild birds). USDA regulations require that import permits accompany properly sanitized poultry products, such as raw feathers. USDA quarantines and tests live birds entering the U.S. from all countries other than Canada. And a USDA smuggling interdiction team works with the Department of Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection to prevent the illegal entry of birds and poultry products.

3-2 If there were a detection of HPAI H5N1 in U.S. commercial poultry, what can we expect to happen next?

Our primary goal is to eradicate the virus from commercial flocks. USDA would activate its HPAI H5N1 national response plan and test samples from the infected flock to determine if it is the HPAI H5N1 virus.

The steps mentioned in 3-1 would then take place. The affected area would be cleaned and disinfected and would not reopen until testing confirmed the area was virus-free. Additionally, we would continue to do a high level of testing throughout the area to ensure that the virus had not spread.

USDA works closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and state public health officials to ensure responders are properly protected. We would be prepared to respond if the virus was detected elsewhere. We have 600 USDA veterinarians and a network of nearly 1,300 animal health workers ready to respond, if needed.

3-3 If there was a detection, what advice would USDA give to operators of other commercial poultry flocks?

We would encourage commercial poultry producers to intensify their biosecurity practices that they've long had in place. They should not loan equipment or vehicles to or borrow them from other farms. Birds from outside sources, such as live bird markets, should not be brought back to the farm.

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They should permit only essential workers and vehicles to enter the farm. Poultry workers should disinfect their shoes, clothes and hands. They should thoroughly clean and disinfect equipment and vehicles entering and leaving the farm and avoid visiting other poultry farms without proper cleaning and disinfection.

Also, they should report sick birds immediately. USDA compensates flock owners for birds that are euthanized, so that economic loss is minimized. The industry understands the importance of eradicating the virus as quickly as possible to protect the industry.

3-4 After a sample is taken, when would USDA have definitive test results on whether it is HPAI H5N1 or not?

Confirmatory testing takes from seven to ten days to complete. The tests first determine and confirm the specific H and N proteins. AI strains in birds are divided into two groups: low pathogenic and highly pathogenic. Determining the pathogenicity (high or low) of the virus will take 7-10 days to complete.

We do not wait for confirmatory test results to take action. We would respond quickly and decisively – working side by side with local and state officials. We would have a team on the scene or on the way and would have activated our five-step response plan: quarantine, eradicate, monitor, disinfect, and test.

3-5 In the event of a HPAI H5N1 detection in a commercial flock, who would be in charge?

USDA takes the lead when responding to HPAI in commercial flocks, working closely with federal, state and local partners. USDA veterinarians work with state counterparts to investigate the source and extent of the outbreak. And state and local officials assist with the alerts to other poultry producers/bird market operators/backyard flock owners in the region and help respond to reports of dead birds from the public.

USDA would report this outbreak to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and follow international scientific guidelines.

USDA also coordinates with HHS, DOI, Department of State, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). HHS closely monitors human health- including the health of our responders – and notifies local public health officials. DOI monitors the wild bird population and assists with notifying local wildlife service personnel. And DHS has offered support and assistance with inter-department coordination if we need it.

3-6 What could the economic impacts of an HPAI H5N1 detection in commercial flocks be?

There is no way to predict the economic impact. We would take the appropriate action to prevent further spread of the virus, by controlling movement of poultry and poultry equipment into and out of the control area and humanely culling the birds. We would have increased our monitoring and testing throughout the affected area.

Because we follow international guidelines for AI responses, this should provide assurance to our trading partners that U.S. poultry is safe. And we would hope that our trading partners also would follow international guidelines in terms of their actions. International guidelines suggest that market closures be limited to the geographic area of the outbreak. We would be in close communication with our trading partners to answer their questions and provide updates.

It is important for the public to understand that properly prepared and cooked poultry is safe to eat. People have the power to ensure that their poultry is safe. Proper cooking kills the virus, as it does other germs.

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All commercial poultry in the U.S. is inspected before it is processed. There is no evidence and no reason to believe that infected birds would be sent to processing plants. The chance of infected poultry entering the food supply would be extremely low because of the rapid onset of symptoms as well as the safeguards in place, which include testing of flocks, and Federal inspection programs.

3-7 Would you expect to find more outbreaks of HPAI H5N1?

We would act quickly if additional cases were found. We have 600 USDA veterinarians and a network of nearly 1,300 animal health workers who would be ready to respond, if needed. The USDA lab in Ames, Iowa, along with our network of 39 approved state and university laboratories, have the combined capacity to conduct 18,000 tests per day. We have prepared for the possibility of multiple outbreaks.

We would intensify our monitoring and testing in the area and increase the number and types of samples tested. We would track reports of dead birds to monitor the potential virus spread and work with the industry to step up monitoring.

Additional cases in birds would not signal the start of human flu pandemic. This virus continues to primarily affect birds, not people. There are no reports of human illnesses in the U.S. There is no evidence that this virus is spread easily from person-to-person.

3-8 Would producers be reimbursed for euthanized birds?

Yes. Producers would be reimbursed for euthanized birds based on fair market value. Birds that are infected or are considered exposed to HPAI H5N1 would be eligible for reimbursement.

USDA also would pay for related items that might be seized or destroyed such as wooden crates, bird bedding, and open feed.

USDA humanely euthanizes infected and exposed birds to protect poultry and public health. Our primary goal is to eliminate the virus.

3-9. In the event of an HPAI H5N1 detection in U.S. poultry, would trade restrictions be imposed on the United States?

Our adherence to international guidelines should provide assurance to our trading partners, however restrictions might be imposed on the U.S. but our control measures should minimize the effects. International guidelines suggest that market closures be limited to the geographical area of the outbreak. USDA would assure our trading partners that U.S. poultry continues to be safe to eat. USDA would notify trading partners of any and all new developments.