

# **NEWS RELEASE**

## **Texas Animal Health Commission**

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## **Poultry Disease Detected in Hopkins County; Birds in the Area to be Tested**

A breeder flock with about 24,000 birds was depopulated and buried Thursday, May 27, on a commercial poultry farm in Hopkins County in northeast Texas, near Sulphur Springs. Routine blood tests indicated that the flock, which lays eggs for hatching, had the H7N3 subtype of avian influenza (AI), one of the many strains of the viral disease. While AI does not compromise the food safety of cooked poultry or eggs, some forms of the disease can cause heavy death losses in a flock.

“The National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa, has reported the evidence of the H7N3 AI virus in the flock, but it may be a week or 10 days before virus isolation results are available. There has been very little evidence of clinical signs of disease or increased mortality in the flock, leading us to believe this may be low-pathogenic AI, which causes little death loss in birds” said Dr. Bob Hillman, Texas’ state veterinarian and executive director for the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), the state’s livestock and poultry health regulatory agency. Pathogenicity tests cannot be performed until virus has been isolated from samples. The pathogenicity refers to the virus’ ability to cause illness and death in birds.

“The affected Hopkins County flock was negative for the AI virus during routine surveillance tests 10 weeks ago, and the birds have never been moved from the farm,” said Dr. Hillman. “These factors give us some reassurance that the disease may not have spread in the area. However, we will locate the non-commercial and commercial flocks in at least a 10-mile radius of the affected farm, so that we can begin collecting blood samples and swabs from area poultry and other fowl for laboratory testing.”

The source of the virus in Hopkins County is yet unknown, but Dr. Hillman said migratory waterfowl are a natural reservoir for AI. The disease is usually transmitted from bird to bird through respiratory discharge, but AI virus also can be passed in bird manure, then mechanically transmitted to flocks on boots, shoes, clothing, equipment or tires.

“In Texas, we need to take all actions necessary to ensure that this AI outbreak is quickly stamped out—even if ours is the low-pathogenic form of the H7N3 AI virus,” he said. “Our first priority in Hopkins County was to ensure that the birds were promptly and humanely euthanized, then buried on site, to prevent the potential transmission of disease to other flocks.”

“The poultry houses will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before new birds will be allowed on the farm,” Dr. Hillman noted. “TAHC veterinarians and animal health officials are following strict biosecurity measures to prevent transporting virus off the infected farm, or to or from any premise they visit. The field staff will be wearing disposable coveralls, head coverings and gloves, and they’ll disinfect their rubber boots, vehicle tires, and equipment prior to entering or leaving a premise.”

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### **Add one/Poultry Disease Detected in Hopkins County**

Laboratory tests on samples collected from area birds will be run at the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory in Gonzales or in College Station. Any positive test results will be confirmed at the National Veterinary Services Lab in Ames, Iowa.

“AI has been newsworthy this year, after outbreaks of a different, more dangerous strain were detected and eventually brought under control in Asia,” said Dr. Hillman. “Low-pathogenic AI strains also were detected in Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey early this year. Additionally, Canadian officials are continuing efforts to eradicate an unrelated outbreak of a highly pathogenic form of the H7N3 AI virus in British Columbia.”

“In February and March, we worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to eradicate an outbreak of the highly pathogenic H5N2 strain of AI on a farm in Gonzales County, east of San Antonio. About 6,600 birds were depopulated to stop the disease from spreading. Flocks as far as 30 miles from the affected farm were tested, but no additional infection was found,” he said.

Dr. Hillman said simple biosecurity measures can be taken to help protect flocks:

1. “Keep a spare pair.” Buy a pair of inexpensive rubber boots, and wear them only on your own premise, to avoid ‘tracking in’ disease.
2. “Give germs the brush off!” Use a long-handled brush to scrape off manure, mud or debris from tires, equipment or boots, then disinfect.
3. “Disinfection prevents infection!” Mix a solution of three parts bleach to two parts water, and use it liberally to clean rubber boots and equipment brought onto your farm. If visitors don’t want their vehicle tires sprayed with disinfectant, ask them to park outside your gate.
4. “Make visitors take cover.” Don’t be shy about asking visitors or customers to disinfect their footwear -- or better yet, provide guests with disposable shoe covers, or footwear worn only on your place.

“Good biosecurity creates a barrier against disease,” said Dr. Hillman. “There’s no better time than right now to prevent AI from spreading to other flocks.”