

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)

Detection and Quarantine:

When You Have HPAI in Your Poultry Flock

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is one of the most serious diseases that can affect your poultry flock. It is deadly for poultry, spreads quickly, and can devastate entire industries. In short, an HPAI outbreak is an animal disease emergency. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and States have authority to respond and protect our country’s poultry and livestock from harmful diseases. If there is HPAI at your farm or close to it, you’ll see Federal and State workers responding in the local area. In the first days of the response, our top priority is to immediately contain the outbreak and protect animal health.

Diagnosis and Testing

We can make an early diagnosis of HPAI based on what we observe in your flock. If poultry show signs of infection, we consider it a “suspect case” until we receive test results. This means we can start working with you right away to put measures in place that will stop the disease from spreading.

For HPAI testing, trained personnel need to collect samples from your poultry. The samples first go to a National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) lab for diagnosis. The NAHLN includes State, university, and Federal laboratories located throughout the United States.

This network has the capacity to handle a large volume of sample testing and give results quickly—in most cases, the same day a lab receives samples. With a positive test result (H5 or H7 avian influenza) from the NAHLN laboratory, the suspect case now becomes a “presumptive positive.” This allows us to assign you a case manager, and move forward with confirmatory testing, and initiating the response.

Results are confirmed and tested for pathogenicity at the NVSL, the official reference laboratory for foreign animal disease testing in the United States. The NVSL handles all confirmatory testing for HPAI in our country. NVSL results give us more information about the virus (such as its subtype and genetic sequence). It typically takes NVSL 1-2 days to complete this work, but it may take longer and additional samples may be needed to complete the testing.

Quarantine

One of the most effective ways to stop HPAI from spreading is to set up a quarantine. Only authorized individuals can come in and out of infected farms that are quarantined. There are various movement restrictions for poultry, poultry products, and equipment from quarantined properties and surrounding areas. These controls on movement may allow some commerce to continue without creating an undue risk for animal health.

HOW WILL I KNOW?

If your birds appear sick, report it to your veterinarian. Samples will be collected from your farm to check for HPAI. Testing may also occur without your reporting sick birds if other HPAI cases are already in your local area.

If you do have HPAI in your flock, you will first find out from a State or Federal veterinarian. He or she will inform you after preliminary testing is finished, usually within 24 hours after collecting samples from your farm.

For example, poultry and other animals generally can't be moved at all from farms with an HPAI detection or flocks with a known exposure to HPAI, as well as those being investigated for HPAI signs. For properties outside the control area, there are often no movement restrictions; however, we monitor for HPAI through routine surveillance testing.

Initial quarantine authority rests with State government. The State issues quarantines and/or other restrictions that cover movements. Restrictions will vary depending on the State's own authorities and regulations and the scope of the outbreak. In some cases, USDA may issue a declaration of emergency under the Secretary's order.

Tracking Disease Spread

In an HPAI outbreak, it is crucial to find out where the infection came from and where it may have spread. To do this, we investigate and trace the movement of animals in and out of your farm, leading up to when HPAI was found in your flock and right after the detection. This is called an "epidemiological investigation."

Our goals are to:

- define the nature of the outbreak,
- identify the risk factors for disease spread,
- develop ways to reduce those risks, and
- locate all other infected or potentially infected sites.

This information helps us respond to the outbreak more effectively and stop the disease in its tracks. We can find infected poultry quickly and eliminate disease pockets before the outbreak has a chance to spread any further. The information also helps us give more detail on how you can best protect flocks from HPAI, based on the specifics of your own farm and how the disease got there. In doing so, we can better protect your operation and the poultry industry as a whole.

For More Information

If you have specific questions, talk with your case manager or call the nearest USDA office (www.aphis.usda.gov/animal-health/state-offices).

For general information on HPAI and emergency response, go to www.usda.gov/avian_influenza.html, www.aphis.usda.gov/animalhealth/defendtheflock and www.aphis.usda.gov/fadprep.

Following quarantines, using proper biosecurity, and supporting the disease response are the most important things you can do to keep HPAI from spreading. The faster we can contain the disease, the faster you can get back to business.

ACTIONS YOU NEED TO TAKE

Here are your main responsibilities at this early stage of the response:

- Know and adhere to all quarantine restrictions.
- Follow strict biosecurity procedures on your farm. Our emergency response team will instruct you on what to do.
- Train your employees on biosecurity. USDA has training materials if you need them.
- Allow Federal and State personnel access to your property to collect test samples and carry out emergency response work.
- Work with USDA and State officials to complete required paperwork, including an inventory of your flock. We'll let you know what details we need.
- Respond as quickly and completely as you can to our information requests during the epidemiological investigation.

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