



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the situation?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratory has confirmed highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in a flock of commercial broiler chickens in Fulton County, Kentucky.

How was this identified?

On Friday, February 11, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture was notified by the flock veterinarian that there was a sudden increase in broiler chicken deaths. Samples were collected and tested at Murray State University's Breathitt Lab that evening and confirmed late Saturday evening at the APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratories for Highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) the H5N1 Eurasian Strain.

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian influenza (AI) is caused by an influenza type A virus which can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and is carried by free flying waterfowl such as ducks, geese and shorebirds. According to the CDC, avian influenza detections of this nature do not present an immediate public health concern.

Should consumers be worried if they have purchased poultry or chicken products?

Avian influenza does not present a food safety risk; poultry and eggs are safe to eat when handled and cooked properly. There is no issue with the food supply. There is little to no risk to humans themselves.

What is the risk to public health?

A good and important question. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, these avian influenza detections [do not present an immediate public health concern](#). As a reminder, the proper handling and cooking of poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165 °F kills bacteria and viruses. For more information from the CDC, [please visit the agency's spotlight article](#).

What are the signs of high path avian influenza?

Some signs of HPAI include sudden death of poultry without clinical signs, respiratory signs (nasal discharge, coughing sneezing), a lack of energy or appetite, decreased egg production or soft-shelled or misshapen eggs.

What are you doing to contain the spread of this virus?

We are working closely with USDA on a joint incident response. We dealt with a low pathogenic strain of this virus 2017, so our poultry industry has some experience with this avian influenza. Other states have been dealing with this already this year. State officials quarantined the affected premises, and birds on affected premises will not enter the food system. We've created an incident management team which includes members of the poultry industry, as well as officials from USDA. We have also included our counterparts in Tennessee to help increase monitoring and surveillance of the virus near the border.

Since the initial detection was near the Kentucky – Tennessee border in Fulton County, we are initiating a coordinated joint response with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. That team is up and running and actively addressing this situation.

How long can this go on?

It really depends. We are working to increase testing and surveillance in the area of the positive premises. We know that this virus was first detected in commercial poultry in southern Indiana and in wild birds in in states along the east coast. So, we are going to increase surveillance and testing and keep the public informed.

What does that look like for backyard producers as opposed to commercial operators?

We will be going door to door to inform folks with backyard flocks that this virus has been identified, and make them aware of the signs. And if they have sick birds, we will sample them to determine if they are infected with HPAI. Right now, we have a 10 kilometer radius we are using to increase surveillance and testing, but we will adjust that radius as needed.

What should poultry owners do?

In addition to practicing good biosecurity, all bird owners should prevent contact between their birds and wild birds and report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to State and Federal officials. You can report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to USDA through a toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593.