



## **Avian Influenza situation in Europe & Update on poultry flock registration**

**AI Alert: 03/2019**

### **Current situation with Avian Influenza in Europe- H3 LPAI in Belgium**

Since January 2019, the Belgian authorities have reported a number of outbreaks of non notifiable, low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) in poultry. As of the 12 June 2019, 71 outbreaks of LPAI of the H3 subtype have been reported, 6 of which have been confirmed as H3N1. The strain is genetically related to a strain isolated from a wild bird in the Netherlands in 2017. The majority of outbreaks are clustered in the provinces of East and West Flanders.

Symptoms observed in affected flocks range from no clinical signs to a sudden drop in egg production (20-100%) and feed intake and up to 60% mortality in some cases. Affected flocks include breeders, broilers, laying hens, turkeys and ostrich. No common links between affected farms have been identified.

Under EU law and OIE rules on avian influenza, low pathogenic avian influenza of the H3 subtype is a non-notifiable form of avian influenza<sup>i</sup>. Therefore there is no legal requirement to cull affected flocks and introduce the same controls as required by other notifiable subtypes of avian influenza such as H5N8 or H5N6. However since 16 May 2019 temporary legal measures have been introduced by the Belgian authorities to deal with the outbreaks which include:

- Reinforced passive surveillance
- Enhanced biosecurity measures (e.g. cleaning and disinfection of vehicles, egg trays, access to farms restricted)
- Pre-movement testing of young laying hens, breeding hens and breeding cocks before transport to other farms
- Post-movement testing of young laying hens, breeding hens and breeding cocks at the farm of destination
- Testing of breeding hens before transport of hatching eggs to hatchery
- After depopulation, infected farms cleaned and disinfected and waiting period of at least 21 days before restocking.

### **Situation in Ireland**

The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) implements an active surveillance programme for avian influenza in both poultry and wild birds which involves sampling a proportion

of birds in all poultry categories on an annual basis and testing them for the presence of avian influenza viruses. Wild birds of certain target species that are found dead are also tested for avian influenza viruses. This surveillance programme aims to provide valuable information to DAFM on the presence of circulating LPAI subtypes in particular, in both poultry and wild birds and contributes to DAFM's overall early warning system for avian influenza. In addition a passive surveillance program for avian influenza is in place whereby poultry owners are required to notify their private veterinarian or their Regional Veterinary Office if they suspect their birds may be infected with an avian influenza virus.

### **Advice to flock owners**

The situation in Belgium illustrates that flock owners and other stakeholders should remain vigilant to the threat of avian influenza even outside of the high risk period for the disease that is associated with the movement of wild migratory birds. In addition to the risk from wild birds, avian influenza viruses can be spread through the following means:

- Contact with infected poultry or poultry products
- Contaminated clothing and footwear
- Contaminated vehicles and equipment
- Contaminated feed and water
- Contaminated manure and litter
- Rodents or farm dogs and cats, which may act as mechanical vectors.

Flock owners should implement strategic, ongoing biosecurity measures to protect their flock – in particular by:

- Only allowing essential personnel come into contact with poultry
- Implementing high level of biosecurity around movement of personnel, vehicles, equipment on to farms
- Implementing and all in all out policy for poultry
- Discouraging wild birds and preventing direct contact with poultry
- Feeding poultry indoors or under cover where possible.

Specific biosecurity advice for different types of poultry flocks can be found here:

[https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/avian\\_influenza/biosecurityadvice/](https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/avian_influenza/biosecurityadvice/)

### **Update of DAFM's Poultry Premises Registration Database**

DAFM is currently carrying out a comprehensive update of its register of poultry (and other bird) premises in Ireland<sup>iii</sup>. The purpose of the update is to ensure that DAFM has up to date and accurate information on where poultry are kept as well information on the different species kept and their use. The accuracy of this information is important as it will ensure that prompt action can be taken in the event of a disease threat or outbreak in order to protect the health and welfare of all poultry in Ireland.

The update is being carried out in two phases. In the first phase, DAFM targeted commercial poultry flocks (flocks where product from poultry is placed on the market) and the second phase targeted non-commercial or “backyard” flocks. Any person who is currently registered with DAFM as keeping poultry will have received a letter from DAFM within the last month requesting that they confirm/update their premises and flock details. Copies of the letters issued are attached to this e mail for information.

If you have received a letter from DAFM regarding your flock please ensure that you complete the accompanying form and return it by the date indicated, even if you no longer keep poultry. If you do not keep poultry yourself but are affiliated to or involved with anyone who does, please encourage them to complete and submit their forms to DAFM.

Full details on how to register a new poultry flock can be found here:

[https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/avian\\_influenza/poultryregistration/](https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/avian_influenza/poultryregistration/)

## **NDCC & Border Inspection Posts Division**

**17 June 2019**

### **Further reading:**

[https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/avian\\_influenza/](https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/avian_influenza/)

### **RVO contact details**

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/contact/>

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<sup>i</sup> Avian influenza is defined in EU law as: ‘avian influenza’ means an infection of poultry or other captive birds caused by any influenza A virus:

(a) of the subtypes H5 or H7; or

(b) with an intravenous pathogenicity index (IVPI) in six-week old chickens greater than 1.2;

<sup>ii</sup> Anyone who keeps poultry, who deals or trades in poultry, including those persons who keep small numbers of poultry for their own use, are legally bound to register their premises with the Department under the Control on Places where Poultry are kept Regulations 2014 (S.I. 114 of 2014). Persons that own other birds such as racing pigeons, aviary birds or other captive birds are also encouraged to register with the Department.