

Report to the Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee

16 February 2017

Avian Flu Update

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Purpose of the report

To inform the Committee of the latest developments with the current outbreak on avian flu.

About avian influenza

1. Avian influenza (bird flu) mainly affects birds. It can also affect humans and other mammals. Some strains of avian influenza cause a notifiable disease. If businesses suspect any strain of avian flu they are duty bound to inform their nearest Animal Plant and Health Agency at Defra. Failure to do so is an offence.
2. Keepers of poultry are advised to keep a close watch on their birds for signs of disease, and maintain high levels of biosecurity at all times. If they have any concerns about the health of your poultry, keepers are advised to seek prompt advice from their vet.
3. If people are keeping flocks of 50 or more birds they must register their flocks with Defra.

How to spot avian influenza

4. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is the more serious type. It is often fatal in birds. The main clinical signs of HPAI in birds are:
 - swollen head
 - blue discolouration of neck and throat
 - loss of appetite
 - respiratory distress such as gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling
 - diarrhoea
 - fewer eggs laid
 - increased mortality
5. Clinical signs can vary between species of bird and some species may show minimal clinical signs (ducks and geese).
6. Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) is usually less serious. It can cause mild breathing problems, but affected birds will not always show clear signs of infection.

7. The severity of LPAI depends on the type of bird and whether it has any other illnesses.
8. Anyone who keeps poultry must keep a close watch on them for any signs of disease, and must seek prompt advice from their vet if they have any concerns.

How avian influenza is spread

9. The disease spreads from bird to bird by direct contact or through contaminated body fluids and faeces.
10. The avian influenza virus changes frequently, creating new strains, and there is a constant risk that one of the new strains may spread easily among people. But there is no evidence that any recent strain of avian influenza has been able to spread directly between people.
11. Avian influenza isn't an airborne disease.

The Response from Government

12. On 4 January 2017 Government announced that the Prevention Zones in place across the whole of Great Britain will remain in place until 28 February 2017. Keepers of poultry and captive birds must "house" them away from wild birds. They must maintain their biosecurity and keep a close watch on the health of their birds.
13. An Avian Influenza Prevention Zone declaration was made by Defra on 6 January 2017. Declarations have also been made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
14. The zones require the immediate and compulsory housing of domestic chickens, hens, turkeys and ducks, or where this is not practical, their complete separation from contact with wild birds. For farmed geese, gamebirds and other captive birds, keepers should take practical steps to keep these birds separate from wild birds.
15. The Prevention Zones help reduce the risk of poultry coming into contact with wild birds which that could carry the virus, or with their droppings. They also reduce the potential for any food or water that poultry use to become contaminated by wild birds. Even when birds are housed there is still a risk of infection, which is why there is an ongoing need for good biosecurity.
16. All bird keepers must now take extra biosecurity steps, including:
 - minimising direct and indirect contact between poultry and wild birds
 - making sure that feed and water can't be accessed by wild birds
 - taking all reasonable precautions to avoid the transfer of contamination between premises, including cleansing and disinfection of equipment, vehicles and footwear
 - reducing the movement of people, vehicles or equipment to and from areas where poultry or captive birds are kept
 - implementing effective vermin control programmes around buildings where poultry or captive birds are kept
 - thoroughly cleansing and disinfecting housing and equipment at the end of a production cycle
 - keeping Defra approved disinfectant at the right concentration at key points such as farm entrances and entrances to bird houses

Backyard flocks

17. All poultry and captive birds, including backyard flocks, must be housed or, where it is not practicable to do so, kept separate from wild birds, to comply with the legal requirements of the Prevention Zones.

Pigeons or birds of prey

18. Pigeons or birds of prey, but keepers should try to prevent them from making direct contact with (or catching) wildfowl and to keep a close watch on the health of their birds.

Case near Settle in North Yorkshire

19. On 6 January 2017, a case of avian influenza H5N8 was confirmed in a small backyard flock of chickens and ducks on a premises near Settle in North Yorkshire. A 3 km Protection Zone and 10 km Surveillance Zone are in place around the premises, and specific restrictions apply.

Case in Lincolnshire

20. On 16 December 2016 Defra confirmed a case of avian influenza H5N8 in turkeys on a poultry farm near Louth, East Lindsey in Lincolnshire. A 3km Protection Zone and a 10km Surveillance Zone were put in place around the premises. Within these zones a range of controls were in place to prevent the spread of disease.

21. The humane culling of all birds at the farm was completed on 17 December 2016 and preliminary cleansing and disinfecting was completed on 19 December 2016. As there have been no more confirmed cases in the zones since cleansing and disinfecting took place, the PZ was lifted from 00:01 hrs on 9 January 2017. Although PZ restrictions are no longer in place, SZ restrictions continue to apply to both the SZ and the former PZ.

Enforcement

22. Avian influenza controls are enforced by designated officers in Environmental Health and/or Trading Standards services.

Advice for the public

23. Some strains of avian influenza can pass to humans, but this is very rare. It usually requires very close contact between the human and infected birds. Based on what is known about the H5N8 strain, the risk to public health is considered very low. There have never been any recorded cases of H5N8 in humans.

24. The Food Standards Agency advise that bird flu does not pose a food safety risk for UK consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

Wild birds

25. If the public find dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or other dead wild birds, such as gulls or birds of prey, they should report them to the Defra helpline (03459 33 55 77).

Recommendations

26. The Committee is asked to note the information as contained within this report.