WASHINGTON, April 2, 2015 – The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has confirmed the presence of highly pathogenic H5N2 avian influenza (HPAI) in Nobles County, Minnesota. This is the fourth confirmation in a commercial flock in Minnesota. The flock of 21,000 turkeys is located within the Mississippi flyway where this strain of avian influenza has previously been identified. CDC considers the risk to people from these HPAI H5 infections in wild birds, backyard flocks and commercial poultry, to be low. No human infections with the virus have been detected at this time.

Samples from the turkey flock, which experienced increased mortality, were tested at the University of Minnesota. APHIS is working closely with the Minnesota Board of Animal Health on a joint incident response. State officials quarantined the affected premises and birds on the property will be depopulated to prevent the spread of the disease. Birds from the flock will not enter the food system.

The Minnesota Department of Health is working directly with poultry workers at the affected facility to ensure that they are taking the proper precautions. As a reminder, the proper handling and cooking of poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165 °F kills bacteria and viruses.

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Additional background
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. AI viruses are classified by a combination of two groups of proteins: hemagglutinin or “H” proteins, of which there are 16 (H1–H16), and neuraminidase or “N” proteins, of which there are 9 (N1–N9). Many different combinations of “H” and “N” proteins are possible. Each combination is considered a different subtype, and can be further broken down into different strains. AI viruses are further classified by their pathogenicity (low or high)—the ability of a particular virus strain to produce disease in domestic chickens.

The HPAI H5N2 virus originated in Asia and spread rapidly along wild bird migratory pathways during 2014, including the Pacific flyway. In the Pacific flyway, the HPAI H5N2 virus has mixed with North American avian influenza viruses, creating new mixed-origin viruses. These mixed-origin viruses contain the Asian-origin H5 part of the virus, which is highly pathogenic to poultry. The N part of these viruses came from North American low pathogenic avian influenza viruses.

USDA has identified two mixed-origin viruses in the Pacific Flyway: the HPAI H5N2 virus and the HPAI H5N1 virus. The new HPAI H5N1 virus is not the same virus as the HPAI H5N1 virus found in Asia, Europe and Africa that has caused some human illness. Only the HPAI H5N2 virus has been detected in the Pacific, Mississippi and Central Flyways.

Detailed analysis of the virus is underway in cooperation with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information about the ongoing avian influenza disease incident visit the APHIS website. More information about avian influenza and public health is available on the CDC website.