

Fact Sheet: Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (Fall 2018)

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza (AI) is a virus that infects wild birds (such as ducks, gulls and shorebirds) and domestic poultry (chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese). Different influenza viruses can infect animals and people, and as with people, different forms of the influenza virus can be more severe than others.

Influenza viruses are classified by a combination of two groups of proteins: the hemagglutinin, or H, proteins, of which there are 16 (H1 to H16) and neuraminidase, or N, proteins, of which there are nine (N1 to N9).

What is Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza?

Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI) occurs naturally in wild birds and can spread to domestic birds. In most cases, it causes no signs of infection or only minor symptoms in birds. Infected birds can recover from infection. These strains are common in the U.S. and around the world. H5N2 LPAI does not pose a risk to human health. There is no food safety concern.

What is Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza?

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is a fatal disease in chickens and turkeys. The virus can spread rapidly throughout a flock and can only be controlled by eliminating infected flocks.

Do I need to be concerned about getting LPAI?

H5N2 LPAI does not pose a risk to human health. There is no food safety concern.

If flocks recover from LPAI, what will happen to the birds?

The Board will continue to monitor and test the flock until the test results are consistently negative for LPAI. At that point, the birds will be considered healthy, will be released from quarantine and allowed to go to slaughter. This is referred to as “controlled marketing.”

Avian Influenza affected millions of chickens and turkeys in 2015. Why is this different?

The virus affecting flocks this October and November is an H5N2 LPAI virus of North American origin. This is a completely different virus than the one that infected birds in 2015. These birds are not sick or dying. The producer and the Board of Animal Health are closely monitoring their health for any changes, but the birds are expected to recover.

The 2015 virus was an H5N2 HPAI virus, which was a combination of a Eurasian H5 proteins and a North American N2 subtype. This virus killed entire flocks within a couple of days of exposure. Birds who contract HPAI are unlikely to recover.

What is the poultry industry doing to protect other flocks from contracting H5N2 LPAI?

Minnesota's poultry industry learned a lot from the 2015 HPAI outbreak. The most important lesson learned was the how vital biosecurity is for poultry facilities. Biosecurity practices are the key defense strategy for commercial poultry flocks. Biosecurity includes keeping animals in a secure area away from people, separating sick animals from healthy ones right away, controlling vehicle traffic onto farms, shower-in/shower-out facilities, and keeping clothing, boots, and equipment clean and disinfected.

How common is LPAI and is Minnesota prepared to respond?

Minnesota's poultry industry anticipates annual introductions of LPAI every spring and fall that coincide with migratory bird movement through the state. This leads to increased surveillance every spring and fall, although routine surveillance occurs year-round, both active (all flocks tested before being marketed) and passive (sick birds are checked for AI) surveillance is used. Most years there will be less than a dozen cases, however the LPAI strains identified will not always be H5 or H7 types which require an official state response. The largest number was approximately 250 flocks in 1988.

The Board has an Initial State Response and Containment Plan (ISRCP) that has been in place since 2006. This plan dictates how the Board and industry will respond to cases of LPAI. The ISRCP has been approved by the USDA, and the poultry industry has agreed to abide by the components of the plan. The ISRCP has been implemented in 2007, 2009, 2011 and now 2018.

Why did the Board stop issuing press releases about new detections?

The Board of Animal Health is deploying a comprehensive response to contain and control this disease. We have confidence in our ability to control detections in flocks, survey for any additional cases, and work with industry to protect the health of the birds and get them to market. Therefore, the Board has transitioned to a "Disease Response Updates" webpage to keep the public informed of any updates or new detections in the low pathogenic avian influenza response. Visit <https://www.mn.gov/bah/disease-response-updates> to view the latest information on the fall 2018 situation.

How is the Board keeping in touch with producers and the poultry industry?

The Board has regularly scheduled conference calls with Minnesota's poultry industry and producer groups to keep them updated on the response. These important partners in disease prevention and response also receive alerts whenever we can confirm suspected avian influenza infections. Likewise, they're also informed when flocks recover from the virus and test negative for avian influenza so they can be moved to market, through controlled marketing.

What is controlled marketing?

Controlled marketing is an approved method for recovered, virus negative, birds to continue into the food supply chain. The flock under quarantine is routinely tested as the laboratory and Board tracks their progress and as the flock recovers. When all samples collected from the flock consistently test negative for influenza, the birds are cleared by the Board of Animal Health to be marketed. The virus test must occur within seven (7) days of slaughter. To provide additional assurances that there is no virus spread, designated routes to slaughter are designed and approved, dedicated trucks and loadout equipment are used, and flocks are marketed at the end of the week to provide additional down time for cleanup of processing trucks and equipment. Poultry owners that use “Controlled marketing” to depopulate their poultry farms are not eligible for flock indemnity.

What if I have more questions?

- Media should contact michael.crusan@state.mn.us or erin.crider@state.mn.us or call 651-201-6830.
- Producers or veterinarians should contact the Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory at 320-231-5170 or poultry@state.mn.us.
- All other questions should be directed to the Board’s general information at 651-296-2942 or animalhealth@state.mn.us.

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