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HEIGHTENED BIOSECURITY PROTOCOLS INVOLVING DELAWARE POULTRY FARMS

Current Situation

Following the announcement on December 28, 2024, of presumptive positive H5 avian influenza in snow geese in Sussex County, the Department confirmed positive highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) on a Kent County poultry farm on January 5, 2025, with early indications that the virus is the D1.1 genotype found in wild birds. Since the snow geese are not just found on the coast but will move inland to forage on farm fields and can move as far into Maryland and New Jersey in a day, this creates a significant risk for spreading HPAI to commercial flocks.

Heightened Biosecurity Guidance

The Delaware Department of Agriculture is issuing the following guidance to protect all poultry – commercial and backyard flocks alike – from potential infection by avian influenza.

- ***No person without a direct role in the poultry operation (e.g., feed trucks, fuel deliveries, service people) should visit poultry farms for the foreseeable future. Local, county, and state governments, as well as allied industries, should cease non-essential visits to poultry farms.***
- Commercial and backyard flock owners should review their biosecurity plans to reduce the transmission of avian influenza to their birds. Virus transmission can occur through foot and vehicular traffic, secretions from birds' mouths, nostrils, eyes, and excrement, contact with infected droppings, movement of infected birds, and contaminated clothing and equipment. For tips on improving biosecurity, visit <https://bit.ly/3Bh6T7p>
- All keepers of domesticated birds should keep their flock from commingling with wild birds and keep them under cover to protect them from coming into contact with infected wild bird droppings. The Delaware Department of Agriculture strongly recommends that organic poultry producers move their flocks indoors until the risk of outdoor access can be reassessed.
- Commercial poultry producers should follow the protocol of notifying the company they grow for when they see any signs of HPAI. Backyard flock owners who notice sick poultry or unusual deaths in their flock should email the Delaware Poultry Health Hotline at poultry.health@delaware.gov or call (302) 698-4507 and provide their contact information, flock size, location, and concerns. ***Do not take dead or sick birds to a lab to be tested or move them off-site.***

Additional Background

Avian influenza (AI) is caused by an influenza type A virus that can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and is carried by free-flying waterfowl and wild birds, such as ducks, geese, raptors, and shorebirds. For more information on avian influenza, visit <https://de.gov/poultry>.

The H5N1 virus has infected a small number of people across the U.S., and to date, there has been no documented transmission between people in the U.S. While continuing testing of people in close contact with animals infected with HPAI indicates a low risk to the general public's health, backyard flock owners should keep birds in outdoor coops and not bring birds that have been living outside into the home. Children and pets should be kept away from wild birds and bird droppings. Avian influenza does not affect poultry meat or egg products, which remain safe to eat. Properly cooking poultry and eggs to 165°F will kill viruses or bacteria.