

Avian Influenza

Fact Sheet



Avian influenza (AI) is a viral disease of birds (mainly migratory waterfowl and shorebirds) that is caused by a group of viruses known as type A influenzas. Wild birds rarely show signs of the disease, even though they can carry and transmit influenza viruses. Domestic poultry are very susceptible to AI, and some strains of the disease can quickly infect and kill entire flocks.

AI strains are divided into two groups based on the severity of the disease they produce in domestic poultry:

Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI) strains produce few clinical signs in infected birds. Migratory birds are considered the natural reservoirs for LPAI which generally does not pose a significant health threat to humans. However, LPAI is monitored because the H5 and H7 strains—can mutate into the more lethal highly pathogenic forms.

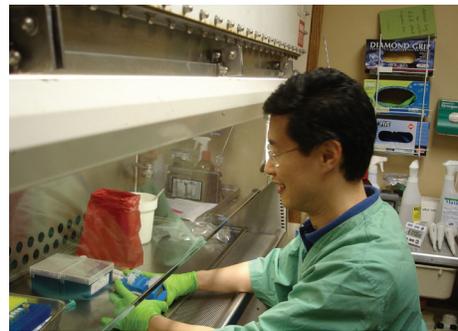
Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) strains cause significant mortality in domestic poultry and is primarily found in commercially raised poultry, though can affect all types of poultry. HPAI is generally not found in wild birds, although the H5N1 strain that is currently of global concern, has caused mortality in several species of wild birds.

The highly pathogenic strain of H5N1 avian influenza is currently *not* present in the United States. However, since it was first reported in domestic poultry in 1996 it has been found in an increasing number of countries in Europe, Asia and Africa.

It is possible that the highly pathogenic strain of H5N1 avian influenza will eventually be detected in this country. If it is detected in wild birds in the United States, this would not necessarily pose a threat to U.S. poultry industry or to the general public. The U.S. government and State domestic animal, wildlife and public health agencies are working closely to prepare, prevent and respond to the potential introduction of highly

pathogenic H5N1 virus into the United States.

There are a number of ways that highly pathogenic H5N1 could potentially reach the United States—wild bird migration, illegal smuggling of birds or poultry products, travel by infected people or people traveling with virus-contaminated articles from regions where H5N1 already exists.



USGS

Monitoring Bird Health in the U.S.

The U.S. Department of the Interior (Interior) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are part of a major interagency effort to monitor wild migratory birds in the United States and to test statistically significant samples of populations of various migratory bird species for the early detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza.

USDA and Interior's agencies, including USDA's Wildlife Services (WS), the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), have been working with State of Alaska biologists to strategically sample live birds, hunter-killed birds and the environment used by these targeted populations for highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in the State.

The Interagency Strategic Plan for monitoring wild birds expands and intensifies efforts in 2006. The primary initial focus of surveillance is on Alaska because it is a major crossroad for several migratory flyways. Birds in

these flyways annually return from their winter migration in Asia and come in contact with other North American migratory birds that return to Alaska in the spring from wintering areas in the southern United States and Central America.

In cooperation with state and local agencies, testing is also being carried out in the Pacific Islands, elsewhere in the Pacific flyway, as well as in the U.S. Central, Mississippi and Atlantic migratory bird flyways. This enhanced monitoring program will provide an early warning to the agriculture, public health and wildlife communities should migratory birds be found to carry the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus.

Collectively, the Interior, USDA and state cooperators plan to collect 75,000 to 100,000 samples from wild birds in 2006. Those samples will be tested at the USGS National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin, and other USDA-certified National Animal Health Laboratory Network facilities across the country. If initial screening indicates the presence of a virus that could be a highly pathogenic variety, the sample will then be sent to the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa for further diagnosis and confirmation.

Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service also works with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) at major U.S. air and seaports to inspect, examine and regulate wild birds imported for the pet trade, research and other purposes.

In addition, many Federal lands provide nesting, migration and wintering habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Interior land management agencies, including the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Reclamation, are educating their employees and working

with stakeholder and support groups and preparing protocols to protect visitors and employees on public lands.

Tim Bowman / USFWS



Bar-tailed godwit

Bird Import Restrictions

As a primary safeguard, USDA maintains trade restrictions on the importation of poultry and poultry products from all affected countries. No birds or bird products can be imported from a country found to have the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain avian influenza in the commercial poultry population. In addition, all imported live birds must be quarantined for 30 days at a USDA facility and tested for avian influenza before entering the United States. This requirement also covers returning U.S.-origin pet birds. The Interior Department and USDA communicate these trade restrictions to the pet bird trade community and incorporate them into decisions on permits for wild bird trade. Additionally, USDA has increased its monitoring of domestic commercial markets for illegally smuggled poultry and poultry products.

John and Karen Hollingsworth / USFWS



Northern pintail (male)

Guidance for Handling Wildlife

The USGS National Wildlife Health Center recommends that people handling wild birds:

- Do not handle birds that are obviously sick or birds found dead.
- Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning birds or other game animals, wash hands with soap and water (or with alcohol-based hand products if the hands are not visibly soiled), and thoroughly clean and disinfect knives, equipment and work surfaces.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling or cleaning birds.
- Cook all meat thoroughly (to 165 degrees) to kill disease organisms and parasites.



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Glen Smart / USFWS

Additional Information

For more information on avian influenza, including information on public health and food safety, visit the following Web sites:

www.pandemicflu.gov

www.usda.gov/birdflu

http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/avian_influenza/index.jsp

http://alaska.fws.gov/media/avian_influenza/index.htm

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Testing at Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska
Tyronne Donnelly/USFWS