

5-26-15

Dear Poultry Producer,

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Penn State, and industry partners, is involved in planning for a response to highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N2 as it continues moving toward the East Coast. The spread of HPAI has been attributed mostly to wild waterfowl and other migratory birds spreading the virus as they come in contact with each other during seasonal migration.

While no virus has yet been detected during waterfowl surveillance testing in the Eastern migratory flightpath, the testing has not involved a large number of birds. Millions of commercial birds, including chickens and turkeys, have either died or have been depopulated in the Northwestern and Midwestern states over the past few months. Several backyard flocks have also been affected. It has not been determined yet exactly how the virus is spreading into the commercial poultry operations, and increased biosecurity on your premises is essential at this time. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture regards the current situation as being serious enough to recommend precautionary measures are taken now to help minimize the threat as much as possible. Producers are being encouraged to take the following steps to help safeguard your flocks and our industry:

- Keep your poultry away from wild water birds and the water that they use. The AI virus can live in that water anywhere from days to weeks. This includes large puddles, small and large ponds, or streams on or near your property.
- Maintain your birds within a building or a screened-in enclosure to prevent contact with or entrance of wild birds. Avoid adding untested birds to your flock.
- Develop a flock plan, to include a disposal plan in case your flock becomes infected. This virus is highly pathogenic and infected flocks have had high mortality rates. Composting on site is the preferred method of disposal. A generic flock plan template is available from the department. Although flock plans may have to be changed depending on conditions, a preliminary plan may help expedite the process and allow a faster return to business.

- Develop a biosecurity plan for your premises- prohibit visitors to your poultry areas, avoid going to places where other birds are present, etc.

*Please refer to the enclosed biosecurity fact sheet for additional precautionary measures. The USDA APHIS website also has biosecurity information along with daily updates on the HPAI situation in the United States. (Go to [aphis.usda.gov](http://aphis.usda.gov), click on "avian influenza")*

As we go about the business of being prepared, we also want to re-assure all residents that:

- Our food supply is safe. The United States has the strongest AI surveillance system in the world. Working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we're able to actively look for the disease and conduct education and outreach for both the public and producers on the most appropriate practices to ensure their health and safety.
- The AI virus risk for humans is very low according to the CDC. No human infections with these viruses have been detected to date.
- We have established an Avian Influenza Task Force, working as a central unit comprised of commonwealth, university, and industry leadership, to add detail to existing response plans as we prepare to address this new threat to our poultry industry.

For anyone who is currently participating in an AI surveillance program, please continue to complete your testing as scheduled. For producers interested in joining a program, contact the Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services (BAHDS) poultry health section at 717-783-6897 or 717-783-6677. If you suspect your flock is showing clinical signs compatible with AI, contact the department's 24-hour phone line at 717-772-2852.

Our department will continue to work with local, state and federal partners to closely follow the virus and will continue to conduct outreach, providing guidance to the state's poultry producers.