

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry continues to prepare for possibility of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF) continues to solidify its response should a case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) be reported and confirmed in Oklahoma. However, as wild birds are on the move, assistant state veterinarian Dr. Michael Herrin reminds the public that their biosecurity help is needed as well.

HPAI is a serious poultry disease and is highly contagious among birds. There have been no reported cases of HPAI in Oklahoma.

“There have been no documented cases of human illness from the particular strain that has been seen in the U.S.,” assistant state veterinarian Dr. Michael Herrin said Tuesday. “There are multiple levels of protection that make it highly unlikely HPAI-infected poultry would ever enter the food chain and proper cooking kills the virus; which means our food supply is very safe.” The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has confirmed the presence of highly pathogenic H7 avian influenza (HPAI) of North American wild bird lineage in a commercial chicken breeder flock in Lincoln County, Tennessee. This is the first confirmed case of HPAI in commercial poultry in the United States this year. The flock of 73,500 is located within the Mississippi flyway.

Samples from the affected flock, which experienced increased mortality, were tested at Tennessee’s Kord Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory and confirmed at the APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa. Virus isolation is ongoing, and NVSL expects to characterize the neuraminidase protein, or “N-type”, of the virus within 48 hours. Since 2014, HPAI strains have been found in wild birds, as well as in a few backyard and commercial poultry flocks.

Again, there have been no reported cases of HPAI in Oklahoma. However, in terms of preparing for response if needed in the future, Herrin said that ODAFF is aware of the locations of each of the commercial operations in Oklahoma and that they are certain those operations would contact ODAFF if they thought there might be a case of HPAI in their flock. Still, Herrin and state veterinarian Dr. Rod Hall said it is important that those with backyard flocks also contact ODAFF immediately if they have a suspicious death loss among their birds.

“Notifying us quickly just increases your chance of mitigating the damage,” Hall said. “That’s one of the biggest things is just the earlier we know about it, the quicker we can contain it. It can be carried from one farm to another if you’re not careful, you can carry it and spread it with people and equipment.

“Also, it wouldn’t be a big thing in a small backyard flock but some of these are pretty good-sized backyard flocks and the sooner they notify us and the sooner we get it confirmed the sooner that we can count the birds that are still alive for indemnity. They can be or will be indemnified by the USDA for any poultry that are still alive on their place. The second we get confirmation from NVSL (the National Veterinary Services Laboratories), then we basically get a count on how many live birds they have and what type they are and then they are indemnified for those, but they are not indemnified for the birds that have already died.”

So what are some of the biosecurity steps that can be taken by those with backyard poultry?

Hall said it is important to prevent direct contact between waterfowl and domestic poultry.

“Don’t let domestic poultry drink water from ponds, lakes, or other water that has had wild waterfowl on or in it,” Hall said. “Consider penning domestic poultry when waterfowl are in the area. Also, you might think about protective netting around the outside to prevent direct contact.”

Hall mentioned that clothing or footwear that has come in contact with waterfowl can spread the virus. It is good to “have dedicated clothing for handling poultry particularly if waterfowl are in the vicinity because a person can’t be too careful.”

“I have said many times that I hope we look back and think about how we planned for something that never happened,” he said. “But it’s very important that we continue to be ready in case we get that call.”

UPDATES:

If you own poultry in Oklahoma and would like to receive updates about HPAI Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), please contact:

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