



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commissioner Gary W. Black

*Avian Influenza is impacting commercial and backyard poultry across the country.
For more information please contact the Georgia Department of Agriculture.*

What is HPAI? Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is a strain of avian influenza characterized by high morbidity and mortality in poultry, as high as 100%.

Can HPAI infect humans? No human cases of AI have been confirmed in the U.S. This particular strain of the virus is not zoonotic, meaning it cannot pass between humans and animals. Public Health is closely monitoring the virus because AI viruses can mutate easily. Therefore, precautions should be taken. At this time, AI is an animal health issue, not a food safety or public health issue.

Is it safe to consume chicken and eggs? All commercially produced poultry is tested for avian influenza prior to being allowed to be processed. Poultry products and eggs are still safe for human consumption. Backyard flocks are not routinely tested as are commercial flocks. Poultry industry recommendations for handling and cooking of poultry should be followed to minimize risks.

Is there a vaccine for HPAI? Yes, but vaccinating to treat avian influenza cannot be considered a standalone solution. There is not a vaccine available at this time that is effective. Considerable research is being done to provide a vaccine which may be used as a tool for possible use against avian influenza.

The use of vaccines in U.S. bird populations can also cause major disruptions in international trade. Many poultry-importing countries will restrict or ban imports based on a country's use of AI vaccination programs.

How long is the virus viable? HPAI prefers cool temperatures and cannot survive in a hot environment. An environment of 65 degrees or greater, for a period of ten days or more, will kill the virus; thus, a cool, moist, and dark environment are favorable for the virus. The virus can live for weeks outside the bird if conditions are favorable. Inside the bird, once the bird dies, the virus will also die in a short period of time dependent upon environmental conditions.

How does the virus spread in poultry? Avian Influenza is highly contagious and easily spreads in birds. Wild waterfowl are a reservoir for the virus. The virus can be spread bird to bird, by human movement such as trucks, trailers, clothing, equipment, and airborne transmission.

Where did the virus originate? How did it get to the United States? It is believed the virus migrated through wild waterfowl flocks from Asia to Canada. From there, wild birds travel in four different flyways heading south for the winter. During the migration in 2014, the virus circulated among wild birds and backyard and domestic poultry (both chickens and turkeys).

Who has been affected by the outbreak? There have been 223 detections in 21 states, with 48,091,293 birds affected to date. It has been found in three of the four waterfowl migratory pathways.

Thus far, the U.S. turkey industry has lost 7.46% of its average inventory to HPAI. The U.S. layer and pullet industries have lost 10.01% and 6.33% of their average inventory respectively.

What does HPAI mean for Georgia? Agriculture remains Georgia's number one industry and HPAI is a direct threat to its most valuable sector. The poultry-egg industry contributes over \$28 Billion annually to Georgia's economy and supports nearly 109,000 jobs.

Does the state have a response for an HPAI outbreak? Yes, the state has a plan for HPAI outbreak. This plan is reviewed yearly and exercised by tabletop and field training exercises multiple times a year. The goal is to contain the virus and prevent it from spreading.

My chicken looks sick. How do I tell if the cause is HPAI? Some common symptoms in birds include severe dehydration, huddling, torticollis, swelling around the eyes, cyanotic (bluish) wattle, drastic decline in egg production, and sudden death. HPAI can cause up to 100% mortality in a short amount of time.

What should I do if I suspect my flock of being infected? Avian Influenza is a reportable disease. Call the Georgia Poultry Laboratory Network at 770-766-6810 or the State Veterinarian's office at 404-656-3667 for assistance.

What does depopulation mean? Georgia's HPAI plan calls for depopulation. This means that the exposed birds would be humanely euthanized.

What happens to the euthanized birds? Proper disposal of dead animals is a regulatory responsibility of the Georgia Department of Agriculture with oversight from the Environmental Protection Division. Several methods of disposal are accepted – burial, incineration, rendering, composting, and landfill. The method used will be dependent upon environmental factors, availability, and disease control.

Could my neighbor's backyard chickens be exposed? Yes, any poultry kept outside is more susceptible to contact with wild waterfowl.

I am a poultry grower. What steps should I take to minimize any risk of infection to my flock? If you have poultry, you should minimize all contact with outside wild waterfowl, with other poultry, and with people who potentially could be exposed. A comprehensive biosecurity program should be established by each poultry grower that provides for control of access as well as cleaning and disinfection. This biosecurity plan should be rigorously followed at all times.

Contact: Georgia Department of Agriculture 1.855.491.1432 or www.agr.georgia.gov