

Issue 2, 2 July 2024

The Poultry Industry Association of New Zealand (PIANZ) and the Egg Producers Federation (EPF) have joined with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) to provide farmers with regular updates about our preparations for high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI).

Update on the situation in Australia

The latest news from Australia is that HPAI H7 strains have been detected in commercial poultry at two farms in New South Wales, eight farms in Victoria and one farm in Australian Capital Territory.

Australia does not have the H5N1 strain that we are particularly concerned about here. The H5N1 strain that has adapted to wildlife is being spread by the movement of wild birds, most recently to the Antarctic Peninsula. The HPAI H7 strains in Australia develop only in poultry, not wild birds (see below for more details on that).

New Zealand has never had a case of high pathogenicity avian influenza of any strain, despite previous outbreaks of the disease in Australia. There are strict measures in place at the border to prevent HPAI from entering New Zealand through cargo, air passengers or other imports, including poultry or egg products entering New Zealand.

There are also many types of surveillance carried out by Biosecurity New Zealand, in partnership with other agencies, organisations and industry.

Biosecurity New Zealand continues to receive regular reports from the public about sick or dead birds in the wild. Large numbers of dying birds is not uncommon and can have environmental causes such as algal blooms and botulism or adverse weather events. The deaths of several thousand mutton birds (tītī) observed in

Southland earlier this year is an example of this. All tests to date show no sign of any exotic avian disease in any of the reported cases Biosecurity New Zealand has investigated.

Farmers play an important part in reporting any concerning signs of avian influenza in wild birds or poultry. If you see three or more sick or dead wild birds, call Biosecurity New Zealand's exotic pest and disease hotline on 0800 80 99 66 – it is staffed 24/7.

Latest updates on the situation in Victoria can be found here: https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-diseases/poultry-diseases/avian-influenza-bird-flu

New South Wales updates can be found here: https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/poultry-and-birds/health-disease/avian-influenza

MPI not concerned by Australia outbreaks

MPI Chief Veterinary Officer Dr Mary van Andel says the difference between the H7 strains detected in Australia and the H5N1 strain means we don't need to be concerned about the threat of wild birds introducing HPAI from Australia to New Zealand.

"The H5N1 strain that has emerged since 2020 is able to establish in wildlife and spread large distances with the movement of wild birds. This is the strain that has been detected in Antarctica and has been the focus of our preparedness."

In contrast, the strains detected in New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory (H7N8) and Victoria (H7N3 and H7N9) appear to have arisen in the traditional way, where low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI) in wild birds is transmitted to poultry, and then mutates to HPAI in the poultry. This is a chance mutation that doesn't happen with each transmission to poultry.

The H5N1 strain is different because the high pathogenicity strain is carried in wild birds and any transmission to poultry will result in HPAI.

"There is some research that indicates climate may be a factor in Australia's outbreaks, because Australia is more prone to big flooding events that cause a large expansion of waterfowl numbers that are naïve to disease. That leads to greater

circulation of viruses and when followed by extended dry periods, this can cause wild birds to interact more with poultry in an attempt to find food and water."

The Australian outbreaks of H7 strains are a good reminder that we can't forget about the way that HPAI has behaved over the past 30 years (and continues to behave in parallel to the H5N1 strain in wildlife).

Strengthening our Biosecurity resilience: Project update

As we noted in our last newsletter, improving on-farm biosecurity now is going to be an essential first line of defence.

MPI's biosecurity arm, Biosecurity New Zealand, is working in partnership with PIANZ and EPF on business continuity and resilience in the event of an outbreak of HPAI. That includes talking with industry to understand what is already being done by operators and farmers as part of their normal risk management activities and what else is needed to support industry.

This work will support poultry meat and egg farmers to have robust biosecurity plans in place, as well as supporting all parts of the wider industry to be prepared.

Some poultry and egg companies have already provided insights into how they operate and the realities of their day-to-day operations. It's important that this work is industry-led, as poultry and egg farmers know the most about their operations.

In addition to this work, PIANZ and EPF chairs met with MPI staff to discuss the work being done to plan for a possible outbreak of HPAI H5N1. Industry is working closely with MPI on this planning. Forty-one workstreams have been set up to look at a wide range of considerations, including matters such as disposal, decontamination, surveillance, depopulation, movement control and vaccination. This is building on the workshops that industry was involved in during November last year.

Learning from overseas experiences

The United Kingdom is closest to New Zealand in terms of size and farm systems, and we have been in close discussions with them about what has worked in their response to HPAI H5N1. During August, representatives from industry and MPI plan to visit the UK to proactively engage with industry counterparts with previous experience of H5N1, including the British Poultry Council and the British Egg

Industry Council. The group will also talk to UK regulators and visit farms to hear about what has worked best in their response to HPAI H5N1.

A visit to Australia is also planned to learn from the response to the current H7 outbreaks there.

Food safety assurance

There is new information on MPI's website that provides accurate information about the safety of egg and chicken products.

The new Avian influenza, food safety and human health page explains that HPAI is not a food safety concern and there is no evidence that people can be infected with HPAI by eating thoroughly cooked poultry, or foods that contain them or eggs.

Thorough cooking means heating food to an internal temperature of:

- 75°C for at least 30 seconds, or
- 70°C for 3 minutes, or
- 65°C for 15 minutes.

HPAI H5N1 webinar with Dr Mary van Andel

The PIANZ and EPF organised webinar on 18 June was attended by 110 PIANZ and EPF members who dialled in to listen to updates from Dr Mary van Andel on HPAI H5N1. This is likely to be the first of a series of webinars on HPAI if there is interest from members. Mary explained why the H5N1 strain is of such concern and outlined its movement across the northern hemisphere and down through the Americas to the Antarctic Peninsula just below South America.

She described MPI's surveillance activities and highlighted the recent increase in both reporting of sick and dead wild birds and subsequent testing for HPAI across New Zealand. PIANZ and EPF members can watch a recording of the webinar, view the slides and read the minutes in the members area of the PIANZ and EPF websites.

Mary has also recently spoken to Federated Farmers and Rural Exchange about HPAI and the work being done to prepare for its possible arrival in New Zealand:

Federated Farmers podcast Bird flu – what do I need to know

REX podcast Alert but not alarmed

Resources

Biosecurity New Zealand's information and advice on HPAI

www.mpi.govt.nz/HPAI

Latest updates on the situation in Victoria

https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-diseases/poultry-diseases/avian-influenza-bird-flu

Latest updates on the situation in New South Wales

https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/poultry-and-birds/health-disease/avian-influenza

Avian influenza, food safety and human health – MPI

https://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/pests-and-diseases-not-in-new-zealand/animal-diseases-not-in-nz/high-pathogenicity-avian-influenza/avian-influenza-food-safety-and-human-health/

Highly pathogenic avian influenza – Health New Zealand

http://www.covid19.mdhb.health.nz/conditions-treatments/infectious-diseases/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-bird-flu/

Contact us

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