

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).

While New Zealand has never had a case of HPAI, we are closely monitoring spread of the H5N1 strain around the world, particularly towards the Ross Sea region in Antarctica.

For New Zealand, an HPAI incursion, particularly of H5N1 2.3.4.4.b, will require a united, coordinated response from everyone in the poultry industry, supported by MPI. A recent meeting between poultry industry leaders and MPI's senior leadership focused on how we can prepare together.

The need for an industry-wide response that reflects biosecurity best practice was discussed, to provide maximum protection for flocks and farms. Additional advice and tools to educate farmers on best practice and progress will be rolled out.

We are fortunate to be able to learn the lessons from the many countries that have already been affected by outbreaks of H5N1. In our frequent conversations with them, the importance of a high standard of on-farm biosecurity is paramount. The United Kingdom is closest to New Zealand in terms of size and farm systems, so we are in close discussions with them about what is most effective. As a close neighbour that has had outbreaks of other forms of HPAI, Australia is helping by sharing resources and what they've learnt.

MPI's Chief Veterinary Officer Dr Mary van Andel says "while New Zealand's geographical isolation has protected us from HPAI in the past, we can't rely on forever.

“Given the unpredictable journey of wild birds who can travel with HPAI, it may still arrive here. While we can’t prevent that, we can work together to reduce its impact,” she says.

PIANZ and EPF are committed to maintaining and improving biosecurity readiness and response standards in partnership with the Government, MPI and other primary industries. It is important to note that while H5N1 will affect poultry, our unique native bird populations are also at risk.

What is HPAI H5N1?

Avian influenza is a highly contagious viral disease that affects both domestic and wild birds. The disease occurs worldwide but different subtypes are more prevalent in certain regions than others.

High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) is a type of avian influenza that can cause severe signs of illness and possible high mortality rates. Infected birds shed the virus in saliva, nasal secretions and faeces. It has been estimated that one faecal deposit with HPAI could contain enough infective doses to infect up to 10,000 birds.

Evolving strains

In 2020, a new strain of HPAI H5N1 emerged that has since been identified throughout Europe, in North, Central and South America, Africa and Asia. Earlier this year it was detected on the Antarctic Peninsula below South America. New Zealand remains one of only three countries without it.

Avian influenza is generally spread by waterfowl, but this new strain of H5N1 has evolved to a greater range of host species and is being carried around the world via migratory birds. It has also spread to around 60 species of mammal. The cattle industry in the United States is particularly affected by it. Called ‘spillover’, transmission to mammals is generally the result of contact with infected birds or their droppings, or water, feed or other material that has been contaminated by infected birds.

The Australian situation

In Victoria, Australia, detection of two different strains of HPAI – H7N3 and H7N9 – has led to movement controls, housing requirements and euthanasia of infected and

in-contact poultry (also known as ‘depopulation’). It’s important to remember that Australia has had several isolated outbreaks of HPAI in commercial poultry in the past, but not the H5NI strain spreading in wildlife around the world. New Zealand has never had a case of high pathogenicity avian influenza, despite previous outbreaks of the disease in Australia. We have strict measures in place at the border to prevent HPAI from entering New Zealand by managed pathways, including poultry or egg products entering the country.

Who would lead the response to an HPAI incursion?

Biosecurity New Zealand, the biosecurity arm of MPI, would be the lead agency if HPAI is detected in New Zealand. Given the widespread impact an HPAI incursion could have, Biosecurity New Zealand is working closely with the Department of Conservation, Ministry of Health, Te Whatu Ora and primary industry partners on a ‘One Health’ approach, to ensure consistency and coordination in responses.

Protecting our flocks from HPAI

If HPAI, particularly the H5N1 strain spreading in wildlife, arrives in New Zealand, there are likely to be significant impacts on poultry. Overseas, infection has spread from wild birds to commercial and domestic poultry, with high mortality rates in infected birds. Euthanasia of infected birds and those they have been in contact with may be necessary (de-population). Increased biosecurity, movement controls and housing restrictions are some of the tools being used to reduce spread overseas.

Improving on-farm biosecurity now is going to be an essential first line of defence, to help our industries prepare for a possible outbreak of HPAI. Biosecurity New Zealand is setting up a project, in partnership with PIANZ and EPF, on business continuity and resilience in the event of an outbreak of HPAI. This work will support poultry meat and egg farmers to have robust biosecurity plans in place that minimise the likelihood and any potential impacts of an HPAI incursion at your property.

This newsletter is one way to keep you up to date on the latest developments locally, and intelligence from our international counterparts. Other initiatives such as dedicated webinars and industry resource updates will also be reliable sources for advice and guidance. A list of where to find these is below.

Coming up: An invitation to an HPAI webinar hosted by PIANZ and EPF, featuring MPI’s Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Mary van Andel, has been sent to all members. Dr

van Andel will bring all attendees up to speed on the latest developments on HPAI H5N1, and there will be an opportunity for farmers to ask her questions important to them. The webinar will be held on **Tuesday 18 June**, from **2-3pm**. A link to register attendance follows:

https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/1a7544da-278b-49d3-90e3-9ecd6005c2e1@32ac78f5-260c-49c5-b8ce-4291d089089a

We look forward to talking further then.

Resources

Biosecurity New Zealand's information and advice on HPAI

www.mpi.govt.nz/HPAI

For more information on the Victoria situation

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

Low and high pathogenicity avian influenza

Disease expert, David Swayne breaks down the differences between low and high pathogenicity bird flu, as well as the impacts on farmers and consumers.

https://youtu.be/ljemEqN9EZI

Contact us

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