H7N6 strain of avian influenza detected in commercial poultry

BIRD FLU
BE READY

Avian influenza – also known as bird flu - is a viral disease of birds found globally. Virus strains are described as low pathogenicity (LPAI) or high pathogenicity (HPAI).

The situation

Testing has confirmed a strain of high pathogenicity strain avian influenza (HPAI), H7N6, in chickens on a commercial free-range egg farm in a remote part of rural Otago.

This is not the HPAI H5N1 strain that has caused deaths in poultry, wild birds, and mammals overseas. New Zealand remains free of HPAI H5N1.

What is HPAI H7N6?

The H7N6 strain is closely related to low pathogenic strains of avian influenza present in wild birds in New Zealand.

When an LPAI strain is introduced to chickens, it can mutate into a high pathogenic strain.

Testing shows the strain is unrelated to the H7 strain of avian influenza identified in Australia earlier this year.

How did it get here?

Biosecurity New Zealand believes free-range laying hens foraging outside on the Otago farm were exposed to the low pathogenicity virus from wild waterfowl, which has then mutated into HPAI.

We have an active surveillance programme for LPAI and test around 2,000 samples from wild birds each year.

What is happening at the Otago farm?

Biosecurity New Zealand has placed strict movement controls on the poultry farm in rural Otago. It's managed by Mainland Poultry.

The biosecurity controls (Restricted Place Notice) restrict the movement (both on and off the farm) of:

- birds;
- poultry products;
- feed; and
- equipment.



The affected shed has been locked down to protect remaining chickens on the farm.

Biosecurity New Zealand is moving quickly, with Mainland Poultry, to depopulate birds on the property. A buffer zone has been placed around the farm.

There have been no reports of ill or dead birds on other poultry farms and there are no human health concerns.

Eating eggs and poultry products

There are no food safety concerns. Avian influenza viruses are sensitive to heat treatment. It is safe to eat thoroughly cooked egg and poultry products.

There is no evidence that people can be infected with avian influenza by eating thoroughly cooked eggs or poultry (like chicken, turkey, or duck), or foods that contain them.

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.

Does this mean New Zealand is at greater risk of getting H5N1?

The strain detected in Otago, H7N6, is different from H5N1. The detection of H7N6 does not change the likelihood or risk of H5N1 arriving in New Zealand.

Biosecurity New Zealand and our partners have surveillance programmes in place to detect the arrival of the most concerning strain of HPAI and other exotic diseases.

How we have been preparing

Biosecurity New Zealand has been preparing for an event like this for some time.

International experience with avian influenza has shown us this particular strain can be eradicated quickly and successfully.

We are working closely with industry partners. We have put a lot of effort in with the poultry and egg sector, the Department of Conservation, and Ministry of Health to prepare for H5N1 and that puts us in a good position to deal with the less virulent H7N6 strain found on this farm.

We are assessing the potential impacts of the positive high pathogenic avian influenza result on poultry exports.

How to report suspected HPAI

If you notice poultry or domestic birds showing signs of HPAI, contact your veterinarian first to rule out more common avian diseases. Wait for your veterinarian's instructions before handling any sick or dead birds.

If you see three or more sick or dead wild birds in a group, report it immediately to the exotic pest and disease hotline on **0800 80 99 66**. Do not handle the birds.

Provide as much detail as you can, including:

- a GPS reading or other precise location information
- photographs and/or videos of sick and dead birds
- species identity and estimate of numbers affected
- note how many are sick or freshly dead, and the total number present.

We will take the details and an incursion investigator will be in contact with you. Follow any instructions from MPI for handling of sick or dead birds.

PIANZ

Egg Producers Federation of New Zealand (Inc)

For more information visit
www.mpi.govt.nz/HPAI

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