

9 September 2024

CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER BULLETIN

Greater Sydney avian influenza (H7N8) response update

NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) have been responding to an outbreak of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) (serotype H7N8) since 22 June 2024 in Greater Sydney.

Two commercial poultry farms were confirmed with HPAI and depopulation and disposal is completed. The decontamination phase is ongoing and estimated to be completed by the end of September.

The Emergency Order issued under the Biosecurity Act 2015 was revised on 28 August 2024 to reflect the progress made in responding to the outbreak. This included contracting both the Restricted Emergency Zone and the Control Emergency Zone. The zone contraction highlights the minimal risk of ongoing H7N8 HPAI infection now that the infected birds have been removed.

The emergency order will be in place for a period of six months while the affected farms complete decontamination processes before restocking with poultry.

There is no connection to the NSW H7N8 cases and the current Victorian H7N3 and H7N9 HPAI outbreaks. In addition, the H7N8 strain detected in Greater Sydney is not the same as the globally circulating H5N1 strain that is causing mass poultry and wildlife mortalities overseas.

Eggs and chicken meat remain safe to eat provided they are handled and cooked as per standard food handling practices.

The H7N8 avian influenza virus is not a risk to the public as it rarely affects humans unless there is direct and close contact with sick birds.

Avian influenza: clinical signs to look out for

Avian influenza is an infectious disease caused by an influenza virus and occurs worldwide. Chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, guinea fowl, quail, pheasants, emus and ostriches are among the more than 400 species susceptible to avian influenza. Many species of wild birds, including waterfowl and seabirds can also carry the virus.

The virus is mostly spread by wild birds, particularly ducks, contaminating food or water supplies. For this reason, the disease remains a constant biosecurity threat. Avian influenza can also spread by the movement of eggs, birds, people, vehicles and equipment between farms, and by clothing, footwear, aerosols, water, feed, litter, biting insects and vermin.

Clinical signs of avian influenza include:

- Sudden increase in bird deaths

- Sudden decline in feed and/or water consumption
 - Unusually quiet birds
 - Unusually depressed birds
 - Decreased vocalisation
 - Any decline in egg production from normal to cessation
 - Sudden appearance of pale shell eggs or eggs without shells
 - Any birds with swollen heads/combs/wattles
 - Any birds with dark combs and wattles
 - Any birds with nervous signs e.g. head shaking, head and neck tremors, unsteady gait
 - Abnormal position of head and neck in a reasonable % of birds
 - Respiratory disease e.g. breathing difficulties, coughing, sneezing
 - Purplish patches on the legs and unfeathered skin
 - Watery diarrhoea
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How to report clinical signs

Avian influenza is a notifiable disease in NSW.

If you notice signs consistent with avian influenza, you must report it to the 24-hour Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 or the Local Land Services on 1300 795 299 (during business hours).

Best-practice recommendations for managing HPAI spread risk

Every veterinary clinic that sees avian patients should develop a HPAI protocol to manage the risk of spread of HPAI. While the current outbreak of H7N8 is under control, HPAI remains an ongoing threat for Australia.

At a minimum, this protocol should describe:

- the process for assessing the likelihood of HPAI infection in an avian patient,
- the maximum spread risk that the clinic can practically mitigate, and
- what biosecurity practices will need to be implemented to achieve this.

Wherever possible, gather information prior to the bird presenting to the clinic to assess the likelihood of infection with HPAI and facilitate timely and appropriate care of injured and low HPAI risk birds.

Detailed information to assist you with assessing the risk of HPAI when treating avian species is available on the DPI website under **More information** “Avian influenza information for private veterinarians”.

Further Information

[NSW DPI Avian influenza](#)

[NSW DPI Notifiable pests and diseases](#)

[NSW DPI Emergency Animal Diseases: A guide for veterinarians](#)

[CSIRO Emergency animal diseases: A field guide for veterinarians](#)

[Lab information for veterinarians and sample management](#)

[AUSVETPLAN - Avian influenza Version 5.2](#)

[Animal Health Australia- Avian influenza](#)

[Procedure: HPAI](#)