MINNESOTA
BOARD OF ANIMAL HEALTH

Avian Influenza Frequently Asked Questions

What is Avian Influenza?

- Avian Influenza (AI) is a viral disease that affects all species of birds. Wild waterfowl and shorebirds are the natural reservoir for avian influenza viruses.
- AI viruses can be classified into two categories: low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) which causes mild to no disease in poultry and high pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) which causes severe disease.
- Most AI virus strains are low pathogenic and typically cause few or no signs in infected birds.
- LPAI introductions are relatively common in Minnesota domestic poultry populations because of the large numbers of migrating wild waterfowl that inhabit and move through the state.
- HPAI introductions have been identified in commercial poultry in the U.S. several times and thus the need for disease awareness and focus on LPAI detections.

What are the symptoms of LPAI?

- Signs of LPAI in poultry are typically mild and can easily go undetected.
- In some flocks, birds may be quiet, lack energy, not eat well, cough and/or sneeze, and show a decrease in egg production.

What are the symptoms of HPAI?

- HPAI in poultry is a very serious poultry disease that spreads very quickly.
- Flocks infected with HPAI will appear extremely depressed, quiet and may experience a sudden increase in birds dying without any clinical signs. Birds may have a lack of energy, not eat well, show a decrease in egg production, have swelling and/or purple discoloration of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks, and have a difficult time breathing.

How is AI spread?

- AI is spread easily through droppings or nasal discharge of an infected bird, which contaminates dust and soil.
- People can carry the virus on their shoes, clothes, equipment, and vehicles.

Where is the disease found?

- LPAI is commonly found in waterfowl and can be transmitted between wild birds and domestic poultry.
- HPAI viruses are known to circulate in some poultry populations outside the U.S. and may circulate in wild bird populations within the U.S. Certain strains of LPAI, specifically the H5 and H7 strains, can mutate or change into HPAI if left to circulate uncontrolled in poultry populations.

What is being done to prevent Avian Influenza?

- Early detection is the key in preventing the spread of any form of AI.
- The Minnesota poultry industry participates in voluntary AI surveillance programs to control AI.
- The Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory (MPTL) tests thousands of poultry samples annually for AI as part of year-round regulatory and industry surveillance programs.

Why are my birds being tested?

- The MPTL conducts routine surveillance testing on flocks to make sure the birds have not been exposed to the disease.
- If deemed necessary, some flocks may be subjected to additional testing to ensure the disease is not in the area.

What happens if my birds test positive?

- The Board may conduct additional testing to confirm the results and will conduct an investigation to try to determine the source of the AI.
- The Board will work with the producer and USDA to ensure the disease does not spread to other birds.
- During any AI incident, the Board's goal is to identify and eradicate the disease as quickly as possible to lessen the impact on the poultry industry and maintain animal health in the state.

Does AI affect people?

Some AI viruses have caused rare, sporadic infections in people, resulting in human illness ranging from mild to severe. Mild respiratory symptoms or eye infections are the most common symptoms of human LPAI infections when they do occur.

Can people get AI from eating poultry?

No. Avian Influenza is not a food safety concern.

What is the concern?

- Even though it is rare, certain LPAI viruses can transform into the more serious AI form, HPAI, specifically H5 and H7 viruses.
- Minnesota is ranked first in the nation in turkey production and among the top states in egg production, meat-type chicken production, and upland gamebirds (pheasants, quail, etc.). The combined industries want to take precautions to prevent AI from impacting the state's poultry production.
- Over the past 40 years, there have been many introductions of LPAI into Minnesota poultry. Fortunately, HPAI has never emerged from one of these LPAI introductions in Minnesota poultry.

What should I do if I suspect AI?

- Call the MPTL at 320-231-5170 and talk to a Board representative.
- Collect and submit samples to the MPTL as directed. All commercial poultry producers in Minnesota should have supplies readily available to collect samples if needed. Supplies are available from the MPTL.

The Minnesota Board of Animal Health is committed to maintaining animal health in the state by identifying and eradicating introductions of Avian Influenza as quickly as possible. For more information about AI, call the Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory at 320-231-5170.

Minnesota Plan Attachment 4.1