



## **INFOSHEET: HIGHLY PATHOGENIC (H5N8) AVIAN INFLUENZA IN THE WESTERN CAPE**

Last updated: 5 September 2017

Western Cape Veterinary Services wishes to notify you of the outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Avian influenza is a controlled disease in terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 35 of 1984.

The virus has been isolated from various farms and wild birds. It is confirmed as H5N8 and is killing large numbers of birds.

Currently there have been positive cases in commercial poultry, commercial ducks, ostriches and wild birds in and around Paardeberg, Joostenbergvlakte, Worcester, Caledon, Swellendam, Heidelberg and Calitzdorp. This outbreak is a potential disaster for the poultry and ostrich industries in the Western Cape and we are liaising with Provincial Disaster Management as well as the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning regarding the way forward. All affected farms have been placed under quarantine and we are busy collecting information on the avian population within the 3km and 30km zones around these properties.

### **Commonly asked Questions:**

#### **What is H5N8?**

This is the strain of bird flu that is currently circulating in Europe, Africa, and Asia. It is associated with high mortality in poultry and has been found in many migratory birds.

#### **How is avian influenza spread?**

Avian influenza is primarily spread by direct contact between healthy and infected birds, or through indirect contact with contaminated equipment or other materials. The virus is present in the **faeces** of infected birds and in **discharges** from their noses, mouth and eyes. The virus can spread into domestic flocks kept outdoors through faecal contamination from wild birds, whereas infection among indoor flocks is spread via airborne discharges and faeces.

#### **How will I recognise a bird with avian influenza?**

Avian influenza can infect almost all species of birds. Birds with avian influenza normally die very rapidly, and they may die before any clinical signs are visible.

If signs are seen they may be one or all of the following: reduction in normal vocalization; listlessness; swollen runny eyes; drops in egg production sometimes with pale, misshapen or thin-shelled eggs; respiratory signs such difficulty breathing and foam or blood coming from the nostrils or mouth; neurological signs such as incoordination or abnormal bending

of the neck; a drop in feed and/or water consumption; swollen combs and wattles; swollen head and legs; bruising on the unfeathered parts of legs and feet.

### **Is a vaccine available against avian influenza?**

Vaccines are available overseas but not currently in South Africa. The national Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) is investigating vaccination as a form of control but there are many factors to consider such as surveillance and trade implications. Current practice in most regions of the world requires the culling of infected birds to control an outbreak.

### **Will it help to shoot all the wild birds around my poultry farm?**

This has been tried previously and is not effective or advised.

### **Can people be infected?**

The current outbreak is the H5N8 high pathogenic strain and although it is rapidly fatal in birds, so far, no human cases have occurred.

It is still, however, necessary to take precautions to prevent human infection. Poultry workers and abattoir workers and those who dress their own poultry are most at risk. People are advised not to handle dead bird carcasses without gloves, or to disinfect hands after handling carcasses.

Poultry products from grocery stores are safe for consumption.

### **What should I do when I find sick or dead birds?**

It is very important to report sick or dead birds - both wild birds and poultry - to local veterinary services. Details of local state veterinarians can be found at: <http://www.elsenburg.com/services-and-programmes/veterinary-services-0#s=Animal-Health-and-Disease-Control>.

### **What should I do to prevent my own pet birds/poultry from becoming infected?**

Biosecurity is the most important method of preventing avian influenza from spreading.

- Keep poultry and other birds away from wild birds and their body fluids, through keeping them indoors, or using screens, fencing or nets.
- Access to your property should be restricted as far as possible.
- Vehicles should be disinfected upon entering and exiting your property
- Do not allow any people who have had contact with poultry in the last 48 hours onto your property.
- The use of footbaths upon entry and exit to the poultry house.
- Remove items that attract wild birds such as mortalities or spilled feed.
- Preferably do not handle other birds, and disinfect your hands or any in-contact clothing afterwards.

### **Can I move my birds?**

It is strongly recommended that any movement of pet birds, racing pigeons, breeding birds and show birds within the Western Cape be limited as far as possible and that any bird shows be temporarily suspended. Any poultry or poultry products moving from within 3km of an infected farm must be covered by a movement permit obtainable from your local state veterinarian. ●