



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

AVIAN INFLUENZA FACTSHEET

Name of the disease	Avian influenza (Bird flu) H5N8
What is Avian influenza	<p>There are many strains of AI viruses and generally can be classified into two categories: low pathogenic (LPAI) that typically causes little or no clinical signs in birds and highly pathogenic (HPAI) that can cause severe clinical signs and/or high mortality in birds.</p> <p>Avian influenza is a disease listed under the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) <i>Terrestrial Animal Health Code</i>. Notifiable avian influenza includes two particular subtypes, H5 and H7 that must be reported to the OIE as detailed in the OIE <i>Terrestrial Animal Health Code</i>.</p> <p>It affects several species of birds such as chickens, turkeys, geese, guinea fowl and wild birds.</p>
Where is the disease found in the globe?	AI occurs worldwide and different strains are more prevalent in certain areas of the world than others. Of particular interest are outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 AI that began in south-east Asia in late 2003. Over the past years, several other Asian countries have reported outbreaks and in some, the disease is now considered to be endemic (always present). Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 have also been reported in Africa and Europe.
How is the diseases transmitted?	Several factors can contribute to the spread of AI viruses including globalization and international trade (legally and illegally), marketing practices (live bird markets), farming practices and the presence of the viruses in wild birds. Wild birds are known as reservoirs for AI viruses and normally can carry avian influenza viruses in their respiratory or intestinal tracts and usually do not get sick. Most countries have put in place surveillance measures to

	<p>monitor occurrence and characteristics of AI viruses in wild birds as a form of an early warning system.</p> <p>AI viruses can be spread through direct contact with secretions from infected birds, especially faeces or through contaminated feed, water, equipment and clothing.</p> <p>Apart from being highly contagious among poultry, avian influenza viruses are readily transmitted from farm to farm by the movement of domestic live birds, people (especially when shoes and other clothing are contaminated), and contaminated vehicles, equipment, feed, and cages.</p>
<p>What is the public health risk associated with this disease?</p>	<p>Though some avian influenzas are zoonotic (a disease which primarily affects animals, but causes disease in humans), this particular strain that we are dealing with, H5N8, is reported not to be a zoonosis by both the World Organization for Animal Health and the World Health Organisation.</p> <p>Transmission to humans has occurred when there is close contact with infected birds or heavily contaminated environments.</p>
<p>What are the clinical signs of the disease</p>	<p>In the mild form, signs of illness may be expressed only as ruffled feathers, reduced egg production, or mild effects on the respiratory system.</p> <p>In the severe form of the disease, the virus not only affects the respiratory tract, as in the mild form, but also invades multiple organs and tissues that can result in massive internal haemorrhaging.</p> <p>Some or all of the following clinical signs are evident in birds infected with a highly pathogenic strain of AI (including H5N1 strain):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quietness and extreme depression; • sudden drop in production of eggs, many of which are soft-shelled or shell-less; • wattles and combs become swollen and congested; • swelling of the skin under the eyes; • coughing, sneezing and nervous signs;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diarrhoea; • haemorrhages on the hock; • A few deaths may occur over several days, followed by rapid spread and a mortality rate that can then approach 100% within 48 hours. <p>This strain has had very little clinical manifestation, except deaths.</p>
<p>How is the disease diagnosed?</p>	<p>Avian influenza (AI) may be suspected on the basis of clinical signs and events leading to the disease, in this case high mortalities are the most noticeable clinical picture. Laboratory tests are required to confirm the diagnosis.</p>
<p>What is being done to prevent or control this disease?</p>	<p>Prevention and control measures</p> <p>It is extremely important to have early detection and warning systems and prevention measures in place as part of an effective strategy for AI. This needs to be coupled with similar efforts placed on preparing for a potential outbreak. Surveillance measures are important to detect the presence of infection in poultry.</p> <p>Awareness, in both poultry keepers and general public is key. For the poultry keepers, strict biosecurity measures need to be observed to prevent introduction of the virus to the flock. For the public, emphasis should be on the reporting of any poultry or wild birds' deaths.</p> <p>Wild bird surveillance which should consider different migratory flyways and particularly at mingling points for migrating birds from different continents also serve as a good early warning tool.</p> <p>Measures that are recommended at the farm level include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keep poultry away from areas frequented by wild fowl; • keep control over access to poultry houses by people and equipment; • do not provide elements on property that may attract wild birds; • maintain sanitation of property, poultry houses and equipment; • avoid the introduction of birds of unknown disease status into flock;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • report illness and death of birds • Appropriate disposal of manure and dead poultry.
<p>What is the status of AI in South Africa</p>	<p>In South Africa, the Avian influenza has been detected in parts of Mpumalanga province (Villiers and Val, Standerton). All affected farms have been placed under quarantine and about 260 000 chickens have been culled.</p> <p>The situation is under control and we encourage poultry producers to report any occurrence and or suspicion of occurrence to the nearest Department of Agriculture. Our Animal health team is currently monitoring the situation in the affected areas.</p> <p>We are urging all commercial and backyard farmers to report any cases of large numbers of birds dying to the nearest state vets so the department can send veterinary officials for follow up investigations and collection of samples for confirmation.</p>
<p>Is vaccination allowed in South Africa?</p>	<p>Vaccination against Avian Influenza is prohibited by law. There are several reasons for not allowing vaccination of chickens, and the most pertinent are that vaccinated birds mask the disease and therefore create an endemic situation; surveillance for absence of disease is also impossible in vaccinated birds as they all test positive</p>
<p>What is the nature of immediate or potential danger</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disease is highly infectious and may result in deaths of many chickens in a short space of time. • Export of chickens has been banned and trading partners have been informed on the current situation. • Movement of chickens from quarantine area to non-quarantine area/s has been prohibited. • To date, no human cases of infection with avian influenza H5N8 have

	<p>been reported, however people handling wild birds, sick or dying poultry must wear protective clothing and wash their hands with disinfectants. We urge people to avoid consumption of birds found dead, dying or sick as these could have other food safety concerns other than avian influenza.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The situation may affect the gross income of the poultry industry and may lead to job losses if not contained effectively.
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N.B: To report any high death numbers of wild birds please contact your local State Vet, Animal Health Technician or Extension Officers

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