**Hardin County Extension News Release**

For Further Information Contact:
Mark Badertscher
Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Educator
Phone – 419-674-2297
E-Mail – badertscher.4@osu.edu
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**Avian Influenza Causes Concern**

*Hardin County* – Avian influenza virus has been infecting backyard poultry and commercial flocks in 20 states west of Ohio. The disease is highly contagious in poultry flocks. Infected migratory water fowl appear to be the primary source of the virus spreading into new areas.

The virus is not a health or food safety risk to humans. The virus does not infect humans. It is safe to consume eggs, chicken, and other poultry products. The disease is a major concern to Ohio since poultry and egg production are major industries in the state. Hardin County has two large poultry production operations, consisting of pullet and layer production farms. Also 4-H, FFA, and backyard or hobby flocks are fairly common.

Indiana has recently confirmed the virus in a backyard flock near Fort Wayne, confirming its movement toward northwestern Ohio. Since we are located in the path of wild migratory birds, there is a danger of spreading this disease into our area either from direct or indirect contact of these wild birds with domestic fowl.

The disease is transmitted from direct contact between infected and uninfected birds and indirectly by objects that have come in contact with diseased birds such as people, rodents, pets, feed, vehicles, and equipment. Biosecurity measures need to be taken by poultry owners to prevent the virus from reaching their flocks.

Biosecurity is another name for sanitary practices used by livestock producers to prevent infectious agents from reaching their animals. Dr. Mohamed El-Gazzar, Ohio State University Extension Poultry Veterinarian recommends the following biosecurity practices to protect backyard flocks from direct and indirect contact:
Minimize direct contact with infected birds:

- Avoid contact between your flock and other birds, wild and domestic, especially around open water and pastures.
- Prevent mixing between species within the same flocks, such as ducks, geese, and chickens, and between multiple ages of the same species.
- Purchase birds from the National Poultry Improvement Plan disease free sources.
- Quarantine new birds for a week before mixing with the rest of the flock.
- If you show birds, such as at fairs, quarantine for a week before returning to the main flock.

Practices to minimize indirect contact:

- Do not allow outside people to visit your flock. They could inadvertently carry the disease on their clothes, shoes, hands, or other objects brought with them.
- Dedicate specific clothes and shoes while working with your flock.
- Use disposable coveralls, gloves, and shoe covers when working with your flock.
- Wash your hands before and after handling birds and their surroundings, including feed and water.
- Establish a hand sanitizing station near the flock for use each time the poultry house is entered or exited.
- Do not allow pets near the flock.
- Animal-proof your poultry house, especially against birds (sparrows) and rodents.
- Acquire feed from trusted sources and properly store in a secure place safe from other animals.
- Drinking water should be the same quality as used by humans. Surface water from rivers, ponds, or puddles may contain the virus left by migratory wild birds.

Avian influenza symptoms in a flock include: lack of energy or appetite, decreased egg production; soft-shelled or misshapen eggs; swelling or purple discoloration of head, eyelids, comb, hocks; nasal discharge; coughing; sneezing; incoordination; diarrhea; and sudden death.

If you suspect avian influenza in you flock contact the Ohio Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at 614/728-6220 or animal@agri.ohio.gov

A general resource for backyard poultry health and biosecurity may be found at http://healthybirds.aphis.usda.gov/
General information on avian influenza may found on the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s website: http://www.agri.ohio.gov/divs/ai/ai.aspx?div=ai-hpai.htm

History of the avian influenza may be found at the following address:

This article was adapted from an article written by Ed Lentz, Hancock County OSU Extension. For more information about OSU Extension, Hardin County, visit the Hardin County OSU Extension web site at hardin.osu.edu, the Hardin County OSU Extension Facebook page or contact Mark Badertscher, at 419-674-2297.