



## Avian Influenza: News Update

**Mohamed El-Gazzar, DVM, MAM, PhD, DACPV**

Assistant Professor and Poultry Extension Veterinarian, Department of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, College of Veterinary Medicine, The Ohio State University

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced on March 5, 2017 the detection of H7 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in the state of Tennessee. The affected flock is a Broiler Breeder, 30 to 45 weeks of age, located on an 8 house farm (~10,000 birds in each house) in Lincoln County, located in South Central Tennessee, 2 miles from Alabama border. On Thursday March 2<sup>nd</sup>, mortality increased to 132 dead in one house. On Friday March 4<sup>th</sup>, mortality jumped up to 500. Positive samples from only one house out of 8 were determined to be H7 by Tennessee NAHLN and confirmed by National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) late Saturday. By Sunday March 6<sup>th</sup> afternoon, all houses had been depopulated and onsite burial operations were underway. A control zone of 10 miles (not 10 Kilometers) was immediately started and the initial surveillance of commercial and noncommercial poultry premises within this zone (which extends into the state of Alabama) is near completion. No further positive samples within the zone have been detected thus far.

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, USDA's NVSL confirmed that the complete subtype of the Tennessee virus is H7N9 based on the full genome sequence of all 8 influenza genomic segments. They also emphasized that based on the sequence the virus is of North American (NA) lineage and **“is NOT the same as the China H7N9 virus that has impacted poultry and infected humans in Asia”**. As NVSL explains, while the Tennessee and China viruses have the same designated subtype, they belong to genetically distinct lineages. What is referred to as the North American lineage is the genetic lineage that can be found in migratory wild birds of North America. Wild birds are suspected to be the source of this outbreak as well. While there is no identified direct link between wild birds and this particular farm in Tennessee so far, the H7 NA lineage was detected in wild birds multiple times this year. We don't know how this virus could have jumped from wild to domestic birds, but it is important to note that Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI) can transform into HPAI after they circulate in domestic poultry.

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the Tennessee State Veterinarian confirmed another H7N9 influenza case in a commercial chicken breeder flock in Giles County, Tennessee, which is the county immediately to the east of Lincoln County, where the initial H7N9 virus was detected. However, this case in Giles County is Low Pathogenic Influenza (LPAI). No mortality or clinical signs were reported and it was detected during a routing surveillance testing. On March 14<sup>th</sup>, Alabama announced investigation of 3 potential cases of H7 in Jackson, Lauderdale and Madison counties in north Alabama, all low pathogenic, one in commercial breeder and two in noncommercial flocks. Latter on March 16<sup>th</sup> a second case of H7 HPAI was

confirmed in another broiler breeder flock just one mile away from the index case in Tennessee with high mortality. On March 18th a commercial breeder flock was confirmed to be H7 positive in Christian county, Kentucky with no clinical signs suggesting that it is low pathogenic. Then two more cases were confirmed in Pickens and Madison counties in Alabama on March 22nd. And finally on March 22nd a flock of commercial poultry in Cullman County has tested positive for H7 with no clinical signs.

All in all, we had two highly pathogenic H7 cases, both in Tennessee, 1 mile apart. Also, we had several low pathogenic H7 cases in commercial and noncommercial poultry in Tennessee, Alabama and Kentucky, in addition to one detection of H7 in wild birds in Kentucky. These findings highly suggest that we have a low pathogenic virus given the chance to circulate in domestic poultry until it was transformed into a highly pathogenic virus. This is similar to the Indiana H7 HPAI outbreak of last year.

Meanwhile, another reportable influenza virus was detected in a commercial turkey flock in the state of Wisconsin. A 6-house farm containing 84,000 market turkey toms with 3 houses at 16 weeks of age and 3 houses at 6 weeks of age was confirmed to be positive for H5N2 North American Lineage virus, which is different from the 2015 virus. This virus was classified as LPAI, mild signs of depression prompted the testing of the flock. But because it's an H5 virus, and has the capacity to transform into a HPAI, it is reportable to international organizations. This flock will not be depopulated, it will be sent to the processing plant through a controlled marketing process. The flock will be tested using PCR weekly to ensure the cessation of viral shedding before they are moved to the processing plant.

For the second year in a row, an influenza virus was able to jump from wild birds to commercial poultry population and turn into HPAI. In our view, this points to a significant weakness in our influenza surveillance systems. Our inability to detect these viruses while they are circulating in domestic poultry, allowing them to blindsides us and showing as HPAI outbreaks, invites a revision to our surveillance methodology. A review of "Testing Protocols for Disease Surveillance in Poultry" was written last year (<http://vet.osu.edu/sites/vet.osu.edu/files/documents/extension/Vol%2042%20No%205.pdf>) detailing the decision making process as it relates to improving surveillance methodology.

While surveillance and quick diagnosis are essential tools to detect the virus and limit the spread of the disease and eventually control the outbreak, it's the **BIOSECURITY** efforts that will prevent the infection from reaching your flock, whether it is commercial or noncommercial. Biosecurity can be defined as "*the sound sanitary practices that are used to stop the infectious agent from reaching the host*". Infectious agents are mostly microscopic in nature (cannot be seen by the naked eye). That means that it is very difficult to detect their movement and transmission from one place to another or from one individual to another. So the only option we have to stop their transmission is to put barriers in the face of these microbes to protect our poultry flocks, even though we can't see them. In case of Avian Influenza and other microscopic infectious disease agents, these "biosecurity" barriers can be physical or chemical. Examples of physical barriers include, fences, gates, enclosed poultry houses, or even washing and

cleaning. On the other hand, chemical barriers include disinfectants and detergents that are used to kill these microbes.

Before understanding biosecurity practices and the logic behind them, one must understand the dynamics of disease transmission. Infectious diseases in bird populations can be transmitted by two main ways:

1. Direct transmission, which means the infectious agents are transmitted through direct physical contact between infected and uninfected susceptible individuals.
2. Indirect transmission, which means the infectious agents are transmitted through indirect transportation vehicles to reach the susceptible individuals. In case of diseases that affect birds including avian influenza, the indirect transportation vehicles could include:
  - Humans
  - Domestic animals including pets
  - Wild animals including varmints, rodents and insects
  - Physical objects including equipment
  - Feed
  - Water
  - Environments, including shared pastures, water ponds, or even air.

Accordingly, we have to tailor our biosecurity practices “barriers” to stop both direct and indirect transmission.

1. Practices that aim to prevent direct transmission.
  - Avoid contact between your flock and other birds, wild, domestic, or otherwise.
  - Prevent your birds from mixing with other poultry or wild birds. Mixing of birds often happens around open water bodies and in open pasture.
  - Whenever possible prevent mixing between species within the same flock, and between multiple ages within the same species.
  - Try to acquire birds from National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) disease free sources.
  - If you bring new birds to your flock, quarantine the new birds for 1-3 weeks before mixing with the rest of the flock.
  - If you show birds, attend fairs, or perform any activity where birds from different places come together in one place, quarantine the birds for 1-3 weeks before mixing back with the rest of the flock.
2. Practices that aim to prevent indirect transmission.
  - It is highly recommended **NOT** to bring any visitors to your bird flock. They could be carriers of diseases on their cloths, shoes, hands or any objects they bring with them.
  - It's recommended to have specific cloths and shoes dedicated to working with your birds.

- Additionally, using disposable coveralls, gloves, and shoe covers are highly recommended. They are relatively inexpensive, easy to dispose of and efficient in controlling the infection.
- Hands are the number one suspect when it comes to disease transmission. So, wash your hands before and after handling your birds, their feed, or their water.
- Wash your hands before and after handling any equipment, bedding material, housing material, or any object that comes in contact with the birds.
- Hand sanitizing stations (hand sanitizing gels or foams) should be in place and used every time the poultry house is entered or exited.
- Similarly, feet and foot wear play a very prominent role in transmitting diseases. Footbaths with freshly changed disinfectants (changed daily) should be in place and used every time the poultry house is entered or exited.
- In this link (<http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Disinfection/Assets/Disinfection101.pdf>) a very useful document by the Center for Food Security & Public Health from Iowa State University summarizing available disinfectants. Phenols (on page 13 of the document) are one of the few chemicals that can maintain its activity in hard water and organic matter. It's probably one of the most suitable choices to be used in footbaths.
- Don't bring your pets or allow them access to your birds.
- It is essential to house the birds in animal proof/bird proof houses.
- It is very important to have effective rodent and insect control program. Rodents and insects are notorious for transmitting not only poultry diseases but also human disease.
- Equipment, bedding material, housing material, or any object that comes in contact with the birds should be thoroughly cleaned and properly disinfected before using with your birds.
- Acquire your feed from trusted sources and properly store the feed in dry, cool, and clean places, shielded from access by other birds and animals, particularly rodents.
- Drinking water for birds should be the same quality as drinking water for humans. Surface water from rivers, ponds, or puddles is particularly dangerous as it often contains infectious disease agents from migratory wild birds.
- If possible, try to house your birds at a distance (1/2 mile) away from other poultry and wild bird gathering areas.

These practices should be adopted by anyone who owns, grows, or handles poultry. They also should be implemented at all times and in all situations. Obviously, different farms and different poultry houses, whether they are commercial or noncommercial, can adopt different ways to implement these practices. While you are using the concepts discussed in this article to design your own biosecurity program to fit your own situation keep the following goal in mind:

***“On one hand, there is a worst case scenario when it comes to biosecurity, and that is a mixed species, mixed aged poultry flock that comingles with wild birds and other poultry flocks. On the other hand, there is the best case scenario which is single species, single age poultry flock, all-in-all-out, shower-in-shower-out facility. So, even if you can’t be in the best case scenario, you should do everything in your powers to be as close as possible to the best case scenario and you should do everything in your power to be as far as possible from the worst case scenario. When it comes to biosecurity, never say there is nothing that I can do to protect my birds, there is always something to do to improve your situation”.***

Finally, if you experience any sudden disease signs or sudden mortality in your flock, please contact:

Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory  
8995 East Main Street  
Reynoldsburg, OH 43068-3399  
Phone: (614) 728-6220  
Email: [animal@agri.ohio.gov](mailto:animal@agri.ohio.gov)

**OR**

Ohio Poultry Association  
Phone: (614) 882-6111  
Email: [info@ohiopoultry.org](mailto:info@ohiopoultry.org)



United States National Institute  
Department of of Food and  
Agriculture Agriculture

This effort was supported by Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grant no. (2015-68004-23131) from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.