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Ohio on Lookout for Avian Influenza in Birds

Avian Influenza, or “bird flu,” is a virus that can cause a varying amount of disease among birds. A large-scale outbreak in commercial poultry here could result in serious economic ramifications for the state because of the interdependency of poultry production and other business enterprises involving veterinary medicine, grain production, feed manufacturing, transportation, food processing, and sales.

There have been no outbreaks of highly pathogenic strains of avian influenza reported in Ohio. To date, there have been no incidents of transmission to humans reported in the U.S. While it is unlikely an avian influenza outbreak similar to that in Asia could occur here, the U.S. has significant procedures in place for managing such an outbreak, including destruction and disposal of infected birds.

Systems for raising commercial poultry in the U.S. prevent the birds from having direct contact with wild birds or backyard poultry flocks, which are believed to be the two major sources of avian influenza transmission. The virus can also be spread from infected flocks to other farms by contaminated equipment, clothing, shoes and cages, or while being transported in vehicles. Ohio does not import chickens from Asian countries where avian influenza has been prevalent.

Import Requirements

State law requires all livestock and poultry brought into Ohio to have a certificate of veterinary inspection to ensure the animals are free of disease.

Industry Standards

The industry’s Ohio Poultry Emergency Disease Plan provides standards for producers to follow. For more information, go to the Ohio Poultry Association’s Web site at www.ohiopoultry.org.

Surveillance & Monitoring

The department has provided surveillance for avian influenza on commercial poultry populations for more than 20 years. Tests are conducted at the Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (ADDL), which has a veterinary virologist trained by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to conduct sensitive and specific tests to detect avian influenza.

Current efforts include surveillance testing of commercial poultry from industry collected blood samples. In 2004, the department tested more than 10,200 blood samples. In 2005, more than 14,000 blood samples were tested. In 2006, the laboratory expects to test about 30,000 samples. In addition, market birds from auction sites are sampled and tested for the presence for the virus. Seven locations are sampled monthly from October through March of each year (the time when avian influenza is most prevalent). Flocks sampled from the market auctions include backyard and exhibition birds.

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Laboratory Support

Ohio's nationally accredited Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory provides test support for animal disease control programs, as well as diagnostic laboratory services for veterinarians and livestock and poultry producers in the state. As a member the USDA National Animal Health Lab Network, the ADDL also has the responsibility to provide rapid and comprehensive diagnostic response to emergency disease outbreaks.

The ADDL has a new Biosafety Level 3 lab, which is designed to provide safe and efficient handling of samples containing highly pathogenic agents. It has the capability to test 230 samples per day or 1,610 samples per week, using state-of-the-art DNA testing techniques. The staff includes veterinary pathologists, virologists, bacteriologists, and toxicologists who work with veterinarians, producers, and flock owners in the diagnosis of disease outbreaks.

In the event of an outbreak, the Ohio Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with USDA, will operate under the Animal Disease Incident Annex, which provides for quick and effective containment of any disease outbreak. ODA is responsible for quarantining facilities and disposal of animals during any animal disease outbreak, including avian influenza.

If the Ohio laboratory would find a "highly likely" case of avian influenza, it would be sent to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa for confirmatory testing, which could be complete within three days.

Consumers may call the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Industry at 800-282-1955 with questions or concerns, or visit one of these web sites:

State of Ohio Flu Web site – www.ohiopandemicflu.gov

Ohio Department of Agriculture – www.ohioagriculture.gov/avian

U.S. Department of Agriculture – www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/birdbiosecurity/ or www.usda.gov/birdflu

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/

Ohio Poultry Association (OPA) – www.ohiopoultry.org

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) www.pandemicflu.gov