Updated Outbreak Assessment

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 and H5N2 in poultry in France

7 December 2015

Disease Report

France has reported two additional outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza in poultry both in the Dordogne (European Commission, 2015; see map). In the first, a mixed goose and duck fattening commercial premises, an increase in mortality was reported in three young geese and samples tested positive. However the strain was identified as H5N2 HPAI rather than H5N1. In a further premises, 36km from the IP reported last week, (commercial ducks; 12,000 fattening and 2,000 breeding), samples were taken as part of the EU poultry surveillance programme, and tested positive for H5 serology, but the N subtype has not been determined yet. Disease control measures have been implemented at both premises, including 3km protection and 10km surveillance zones in line with Directive 2005/94/EC.

Situation Assessment

The finding of a seropositive case of H5 in a commercial duck farm is important for two reasons: Firstly, as expected, there are few or only mild clinical signs in Anseriform poultry and; secondly, the EU poultry survey works. Information about whether this farm is connected to the backyard case will be of interest. On the finding of H5N2 HPAI in a goose / duck farm on the basis of clinical signs in goslings, this again is not entirely unsurprising as these are young birds. Late last year and early 2015, when outbreaks of H5N8 HPAI were reported in ducks, clinical signs were observed in young ducklings (M.Kramer, Pers.Comm.).

H5N2 viruses are circulating in the EU: several cases have been reported recently of H5N2 LPAI in Italy, including one this week in a commercial turkey farm in Forli province. The other two were in ornamental birds in Ravenna and Ferrara provinces (all are in Emilia Romagna region) (European Commission, 2015b). In addition, a further outbreak of LPAI
H5 (N subtype not confirmed yet) in commercial chickens and ducks in Lombardy region. These European origin LPAI viruses are reported in poultry (as part of the EU poultry survey) yet mutation into HPAI viruses is a rare event. Until the epidemiology of the current outbreaks in France is known, the index cases, level of spread and the wider impact or risk to other regions and Member States is not known at present.

**Conclusion**

As before, there are still many unknowns, and the risk to the UK as a result of these outbreaks may depend on what the sequencing reveals about the origin of the H5N2 HPAI virus.

At the moment, it is not known whether mutations from LPAI to HPAI (either H5N1 or H5N2) have occurred in the poultry farms themselves or were introduced by some other transmission pathway from another source and if the third case in France is related to either of the other two outbreaks – sequence information will provide more information.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely. We would like to remind all poultry keepers to maintain high standards of biosecurity, remain vigilant and report any suspect clinical signs promptly and in addition using the testing to exclude scheme for avian notifiable disease where appropriate for early safeguard. For more information, please see www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/disease-control/nad

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**References**

European Commission (2015a) Urgent HPAI Fax 045/2015 (01/12/2015) Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) of the H5N1 and H5N2 subtype in poultry in Dordogne, France - Update (2). Received 02/11/2015


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