Updated Situation Assessment #12

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in Europe

16 March 2020

Disease Report

Since our last report on 19 February 2020 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/858047/hpai-europe-update8-jan2020.pdf], Germany has reported an outbreak of HPAI in captive birds (ducks and chickens) at a holding in the east of the country, 250km from the case in wild birds reported in January. Both Poland and Bulgaria have reported multiple new cases in large commercial premises.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza in Poultry and Wild birds Europe September 2019 - March 2020 Overlay: migratory bird flyways
Situation Assessment

Germany reported its first outbreak of HPAI H5N8 in captive birds on 13 March, in the Leipzig region, in the east of the country. A total of 44 birds (6 ducks and 38 chickens) were reported to be present on the holding, of which 24 were affected and died; the remaining 20 were culled. Germany previously reported an outbreak in domestic poultry on 10 February, on a smallholding with laying hens, ducks, geese, pheasants and canaries.

Our previous update on 19 February highlighted Bulgaria’s first reported case of HPAI H5N8 in poultry since April 2019. The affected premises was a duck farm near the city of Plovdiv. Since then, Bulgaria has reported outbreaks on six other poultry farms (including three duck farms) in the Plovdiv region, and on one farm of 16,800 laying hens in the Kardzhali region, southeast of Plovdiv.

Poland has reported 12 new outbreaks since our last update, across 11 different regions, located in central and southwest Poland. All affected premises were commercial duck farms, varying in size between 4,372 and 56,503 birds, with the exception of one backyard holding of 74 ducks.

Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine have reported no new outbreaks since our last update on 19 February.

According to data available on TRACES¹, GB has not imported any live birds or eggs from any areas surrounding the Bulgarian or German outbreaks in the weeks prior to and after the detection of disease. However, GB imported two consignments of hatching eggs (Phasianidae) from the unaffected Ostrzeszów region of Poland on 16 March 2020.

Conclusion

The OIE/FAO international reference laboratory/UK national laboratory at Weybridge has the necessary ongoing diagnostic capability for these strains of virus, whether low or high pathogenicity AI, and continually monitors changes in the virus.

Taking into account the data reported both here and in our previous update, the limited findings in wild birds across Europe, and the possibility of migration to the UK if the weather were to become colder in Eastern Europe; the risk of HPAI in wild birds in the UK is currently LOW (i.e. no change at present). We are monitoring this very closely.

The overall risk for poultry in the UK remains low, but the risk of introduction to individual premises depends upon the level of biosecurity implemented on farm to prevent direct or indirect contact with wild birds. It should be noted that the virus could potentially survive on pasture in wild bird faeces for several weeks at current ambient temperatures,

¹ Trade Control and Expert System
emphasising importance of these measures. We recommend biosecurity should be increased. We are keeping this under review.

Due to the lower numbers of H5 HPAI outbreaks observed in Europe in 2018/19 (especially lower incidence in wild birds associated with mortality) compared to previous years, a larger proportion of the wild bird population may now have more limited immunity to H5 viruses, with a large susceptible population of avian hosts in the form of juvenile birds which migrated to the UK in autumn 2019.

We recommend that all poultry keepers stay vigilant and make themselves aware of the latest information on www.gov.uk, particularly about recommendations for biosecurity and how to register their flocks. We will continue to report on any updates to the situation in Europe and, in particular, any changes in disease distribution or wild bird movements which may increase the risk to the UK.


Authors
Charlotte Coxon
Joe Bowen
Dr Francesca Gauntlett
Alastair George

References
All outbreaks and cases were taken from the Animal Disease Notification System (ADNS).