

Preliminary Outbreak Assessment

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (H7N3) in poultry in the USA

16 April 2020

Ref: VITT/1200 HPAI in USA

Disease Report

The USA has reported an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H7N3 in a commercial turkey flock in Chesterfield County in the State of South Carolina (see map). This is the first outbreak of HPAI in the USA since 2017, however the affected premises is linked to a premises which reported an outbreak of low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI) H7N3 13 March 2020.



Highly pathogenic avian influenza in the USA - April 2020

Situation Assessment

High mortality (1,583 of 34,160, 4.86%) was reported in the flock, along with respiratory signs and snicking, and tests confirmed the presence of HPAI. The remaining 32,577 birds have been culled and disease control measures are in place, including movement controls and surveillance within a 10km control zone (OIE, 2020). The affected premises has an epidemiological link to another commercial poultry premises in South Carolina which previously reported LPAI H7N3 in mid-March, following outbreaks of the same strain in eleven turkey flocks in North Carolina. It is thought that the HPAI H7N3 virus emerged through mutation of the LPAI H7N3 strain found recently in the area (APHIS, 2020).

The risk from migratory birds to the UK is negligible because birds in the USA generally migrate from south to north and do not cross the Atlantic Ocean in spring, and only rarely in autumn when blown off course by strong westerlies.

As stated by USDA, no human cases of this H7N3 avian influenza virus have been detected and there is no immediate public health concern (APHIS, 2020).

Imports of poultry and poultry products from the USA to the EU (including the UK under Commission Regulation 798/2008/EC) have been suspended from the areas of the counties of Chesterfield, Lancaster and Kershaw in South Carolina which fall within the 10km control zone imposed around the affected premises. Under the EU-USA trade agreement, which recognises regionalisation for avian influenza, certificates for consignments that originate from other (disease free) regions of the USA are still accepted. All live poultry, including day old chicks and hatching eggs will enter a 21 day quarantine on entry to the destination establishment, and during this time hatchability and survival of the consignment is monitored for any evidence of HPAI infection, to mitigate, what is already a very low risk.

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. The risk of HPAI incursion in wild birds in the UK should be decreasing at this time of year as waterfowl migrate eastwards from the UK to their breeding grounds in northern Eurasia and is still considered to be **LOW** (i.e. no change at present). We are monitoring this very closely.

The overall risk of infection of 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 ambient temperatures at this time of year, emphasising the importance of these measures. We recommend biosecurity measures should be maintained. We are keeping this under review.

We therefore continue to 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 the USA and, in particular, any changes in disease distribution or wild bird movements which may increase the risk to the UK.

Further information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu> including updated biosecurity advice for poultry keepers for England; <https://gov.wales/avian-influenza> for Wales and; <http://gov.scot/avianinfluenza> for Scotland.

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References

Details of all outbreaks were taken from OIE.

OIE (2020)

https://www.oie.int/wahis_2/public/wahid.php/Reviewreport/Review?page_refer=MapFullEventReport&reportid=33951

APHIS (2020) https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/newsroom/stakeholder-info/sa_by_date/sa-2020/sa-04/hpai-sc



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