

# **OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY**

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**PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry continues to prepare for possibility of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)**

It's a plan based on a possibility.

Daily, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF) continues to solidify its response should a case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) be reported and confirmed in Oklahoma.

HPAI is a serious poultry disease and is highly contagious among birds. There have been no reported cases of HPAI in Oklahoma.

“Also, there have been no documented cases of human illness from the particular strain that has been seen in the U.S.,” assistant state veterinarian Dr. Michael Herrin said Tuesday. “There are multiple levels of protection that make it highly unlikely HPAI-infected poultry would ever enter the food chain and proper cooking kills the virus; which means our food supply is very safe.”

However, since late 2014, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has confirmed several cases of HPAI in the migratory bird paths known as the Pacific, Central, and Mississippi flyways. The disease has been found in wild birds, as well as in a few backyard and commercial poultry flocks.

“We are starting to see the migration of the waterfowl south into Oklahoma,” Herrin said.

Wild migratory waterfowl such as ducks and geese are the natural hosts, added state veterinarian Dr. Rod Hall.

“They rarely become ill from the virus, but can spread it mostly through their feces,” Hall said. “The virus is transmitted via the fecal, oral route. Wild waterfowl pass the virus in their feces, then domestic poultry consume feed or water that has been contaminated by the contaminated feces.”

The consequences of avian influenza can include high death loss, depopulation of poultry not already dead, disposal, disinfection, indemnity and repopulation, according to Hall.

Again, Oklahoma has not experienced any confirmed cases. But, Herrin pointed to the impact HPAI has had in other areas, including Iowa.

The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation commissioned Decision Innovation Solutions to determine the cost to the state of the HPAI outbreak extending from April through June. The economic research firm estimated total cost to the economy of Iowa at \$1.2 billion. The total to date includes direct losses associated with depletion of flocks and indirect effects on the economy. It is estimated that Iowa will lose 8,500 jobs directly and indirectly as a result of infection on 77 farms.

The impact of HPAI has stimulated producers in the state to cooperate to implement programs to prevent a reoccurrence in the fall associated with southward migration of waterfowl. According to the Iowa Poultry Association, producers are intensifying both structural and operational biosecurity and upgrading facilities.

Likewise plans have been created in other states, such as Oklahoma.

“Poultry is a big industry in Oklahoma,” Hall said, “and if we don’t do a good job of controlling this, then it definitely can impact the industry’s ability to export and sell those birds. If it spreads then we end up with a lot more dead birds. So it’s just so important not only from the aspect that we’re veterinarians and we train to prevent animal suffering and prevent animal death, so we want to do that, but now that we work for the Department of Agriculture, we’re also trying to prevent disease incursion into the state and then we’re also trying to help our industry within the state. It all just fits together.

“If we have a lot of infected farms, because either we don’t react quickly enough or the people that have the birds don’t use proper biosecurity and spread it, then we not only have a lot more dead birds but it has a more severe impact on the poultry industry and the general economy of Oklahoma. I’ve seen a few figures, but in Iowa and Minnesota there has been a big impact not just on the poultry industry but the general economy. People that are working in the industry, they don’t have jobs some of them now, so they don’t go to town and buy other things, and we all know how it cycles.”

Planning has come in many different forms on several different levels.

“As far as groups we’ve worked with, it probably starts with our tri-state group,” Herrin said. “We meet regularly with Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri. That’s state regulatory people, federal regulatory people, industry and extension. All of those folks meet on a regular basis and this has been a hot topic obviously this year more than most.

“In-state, we have met with Oklahoma Emergency Management and the Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security. They represent disaster relief response capabilities and can assist us with resources, be it people or equipment.”

Herrin said that if ODAFF received a call after a suspicious death loss or a suspicious initial test result, they would take samples or resample so that there is a regulatory sample. That would be sent quickly to the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa for confirmation.

“It’s required that they confirm the first case in your state,” Herrin said. “If the suspicion is high, we would start mobilizing to the area. We have a mobile lab trailer that we will use as our

incident command post. We would take the foam machine in that direction and notify all of our field guys to help with the reconnaissance.”

The Kifco foam machine is capable of producing huge volumes of water-based foam which serves as an approved method to depopulate a large poultry flock with minimal exposure of the field personnel to the HPAI virus, according to Herrin.

One of the primary challenges should a case of HPAI be confirmed in Oklahoma, would be notification of everyone in the immediate area in an effort to stop the spread to other birds.

“Our first step with a confirmed case is to locate it on the map, draw two circles from the reported area, one of just under two miles and another of just over 6 miles,” Herrin said. “We’d go door to door.

“We locate every residence, every premises, within the circles and document if there are poultry, if there are pet birds, if there are swine. Those are the animals that would be affected by avian influenza potentially.”

In July, Herrin was among members of an ODAFF Incident Command team participating in a HPAI Reconnaissance Exercise in eastern Oklahoma. The exercise provided those individuals an idea of the manpower that would be needed. It also led Herrin and others to work with those on the county level to record the premises in their area.

In terms of response, Herrin said that ODAFF is aware of the locations of each of the commercial operations and that they are certain those operations would contact ODAFF if they thought there might be a case of HPAI in their flock. However, Herrin and Hall said it is important that those with backyard flocks also contact ODAFF immediately if they have a suspicious death loss among their birds.

“Notifying us quickly just increases your chance of mitigating the damage,” Hall said. “That’s one of the biggest things is just the earlier we know about it, the quicker we can contain it. It can be carried from one farm to another if you’re not careful, you can carry it and spread it with people and equipment.

“Also, it wouldn’t be a big thing in a small backyard flock but some of these are pretty good-sized backyard flocks and the sooner they notify us and the sooner we get it confirmed the sooner that we can count the birds that are still alive for indemnity. They can be or will be indemnified by USDA for any poultry that are still alive on their place. The second we get confirmation from NVSL, then we basically get a count on how many live birds they have and what type they are and then they are indemnified for those, but they are not indemnified for the birds that have already died.”

So what are some of the biosecurity steps that can be taken by those with backyard poultry?

Hall said it is important to prevent direct contact between waterfowl and domestic poultry.

“Don’t let domestic poultry drink water from ponds, lakes, or other water that has had wild waterfowl on or in it,” Hall said. “Consider penning domestic poultry when waterfowl are in the area. Also, you might think about protective netting around the outside to prevent direct contact.”

Hall mentioned that clothing or footwear that has come in contact with waterfowl can spread the virus. It is good to “have dedicated clothing for handling poultry particularly if waterfowl are in the vicinity because a person can’t be too careful.”

“I have said many times that I hope we look back and think about how we planned for something that never happened,” he said. “But it’s very important that we continue to be ready in case we get that call.”

#### **UPDATES:**

If you own poultry in Oklahoma and would like to receive updates about HPAI Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), please contact: Dr. Michael Herrin, assistant state veterinarian, at Michael.herrin@ag.ok.gov, (405) 522-6139.

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**Photo caption:** Since late 2014, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has confirmed several cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in the migratory bird paths known as the Pacific, Central, and Mississippi flyways.

