

Western Cape Department of Agriculture on possible incidence of bird flu in Western Cape

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture is investigating possible incidences of Highly Pathogenic Avian influenza (HPAI), type H5N8, on two ostrich farms in the Heidelberg area. Avian influenza is a controlled disease in terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 35 of 1984.



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Investigations on the farms are in progress and both farms have been placed under quarantine. Quarantine measures entail no movement of birds to and from the affected properties will be allowed. People and vehicles will have to adhere to strict hygiene measures.

Thirteen outbreaks have occurred in South Africa since June this year, in Mpumalanga and Gauteng. The outbreaks involved seven commercial chicken farms, two groups of backyard chickens, three sets of wild birds and one group of domestic geese. Avian influenza is a viral respiratory disease of birds believed to be transmitted by wild migratory birds. In southern Africa, the H5N8 strain of the disease also affected the poultry industry in Zimbabwe, where thousands of commercial birds have died or had to be culled.

This strain of the virus has so far shown no sign of being infectious to people. Constant monitoring of exposed people in South Africa has supported this. Ostrich and chicken meat on sale in retail outlets is safe for human consumption.

Avian Influenza is primarily spread by direct contact between healthy and infected birds, or through indirect contact with contaminated equipment or other materials. The virus is present in the faeces of infected birds and in discharges from their noses, mouth and eyes. The virus can spread into domestic flocks kept outdoors through faecal contamination from wild birds, whereas infection among indoor flocks is spread via airborne discharges and faeces.

There is currently no preventive vaccine or treatment for HPAI H5N8. Current practice in most regions of the world requires the culling of infected birds. There is no benefit to be gained in attempting to control the virus in wild birds through culling or habitat destruction.

General recommendations:

It is very important to report sick or dead birds - both wild birds and poultry - to local authorities (veterinary services, public health officials, community leaders etc.) Details of local state veterinarians can be found at:

<http://www.elsenburg.com/services-and-programmes/veterinary-services-0#s...>

Farmers and poultry producers should step up their biosecurity measures in order to prevent potential virus introduction from wild birds or their faeces;

It is important to keep poultry and other animals away from wild birds and their body fluids, through screens, fencing or nets. Commercial poultry operations and backyard poultry owners should avoid the introduction of the virus through contaminated clothes, footwear, vehicles or equipment used in waterfowl hunting.

Because of the HPAI H5N8 outbreaks, the buyers or sellers of more than five live chickens for any purpose other than direct slaughter at a registered abattoir will be subjected to the following conditions (quoting Media Briefing by Minister Senzeni Zokwana, Avian Influenza Outbreak In South Africa, 29 June 2017, Department Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries):

The sellers of live chickens, including commercial farmers, as well as the traders who buy and resell these chickens, must register with the Poultry Disease Management Agency (PDMA). The national Director Animal Health has authorised the PDMA to register and keep records of all parties selling and buying live chickens. The PDMA is an independent organisation and all information about the trade of live chickens will be kept strictly confidential.

Only registered sellers and buyers are allowed to trade and it is the responsibility of both the seller and the buyer to ensure that their counterpart is registered.

Farmers may only sell live chickens certified as healthy by a veterinarian or Animal Health Technician.

Traders may only sell healthy chickens and must keep records as prescribed.

Sellers and buyers registering with the PDMA would have to sign an undertaking to adhere to the required control measures.

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