

**H7N9 Avian Influenza**  
**April 17, 2013**

**Statement by Dr. John Clifford**  
**Chief Veterinary Officer for the United States**

We are hearing concerns about the H7N9 strain of avian influenza that was recently discovered in parts of China and is causing illness in people. At this time, let me make it clear we have not found this strain of avian influenza in the United States - in either people or birds. USDA is collaborating with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other government agencies to respond to concerns about the disease entering the United States.

USDA is prepared to deal with an outbreak of H7N9 in poultry, if necessary. However, currently there is no reason to believe this disease is a concern for the United States' poultry population. We have processes in place to protect our poultry from a disease introduction, as well as to look for diseases should they be present.

The best way to keep our poultry safe is to prevent the virus from entering this country. We do this through a series of trade restrictions. We do not allow live birds, poultry and hatching eggs from countries affected by avian influenza, including China, to be imported into the U.S. Poultry products from affected countries are only allowed into the U.S. if the items are processed in a manner that will kill the virus. Pet birds imported into the U.S. are tested for AI and quarantined in a USDA facility for 30 days before entering the country. These measures, along with the agricultural inspections of cargo and passengers at ports of entry conducted by our partners at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), effectively reduce the chances of AI entering the U.S.

We have a strong surveillance program in place, where we actively look for any form of avian influenza, not just H7N9. All commercial poultry flocks in the U.S. are tested for avian influenza through industry, State and Federal efforts. Our surveillance and testing efforts over the past 6 months, encompassing more than 478,000 tests, found no commercial flocks and only 4 live bird markets with low pathogenicity avian influenza. However, these were not the H7N9 strain found in China.

USDA also tests wild birds for avian influenza in cooperation with the States and the Department of the Interior. The risk of H7N9 reaching North America through migratory birds is low. However, we will continue to evaluate the risk of transmission of this virus through wild birds, and would have more than sufficient time to put the proper surveillance system in place if it becomes necessary.

Since this is a new strain, we are receiving a copy of the virus to study. This will allow us to better understand how it behaves, so we can most effectively plan our surveillance and response strategies.