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# USDA Takes Action to Help Protect Endangered California Condors From Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

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The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is taking emergency action to help protect the critically endangered California condors after several have died from highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). APHIS has approved the emergency use of HPAI vaccine in an attempt to prevent additional deaths of these birds.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) approached APHIS about vaccination after a California condor was found dead in late March and then confirmed positive for HPAI at APHIS' National Veterinary Services Laboratories. Since then, 13 condors have died and were confirmed to have HPAI, and two others are in recovery at a rehabilitation center.

The authorized vaccine is a killed, inactivated product conditionally licensed by APHIS' Center for Veterinary Biologics in 2016. Since the vaccine has not previously been tested against this strain of the virus in these species, the first step in the vaccination program is a pilot safety study in North American vultures, a similar species, to investigate if there are any adverse effects before giving the vaccine to the endangered condors. This trial is funded by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and will be carried out with the surrogate vultures in North Carolina beginning in May 2023.

APHIS grants emergency use approvals, which exempt products from one or more regulatory requirements normally applied to licensed vaccines, to prevent, control, or eradicate animal diseases in connection with an official USDA program and/or an emergency animal disease situation. APHIS approved this emergency vaccination of the condors because these birds are critically endangered, closely monitored, and their population is very small which allows close monitoring of the vaccine to ensure it is administered only to the approved population. Vultures and California condors are wild birds, not poultry as defined by the World Organization of Animal Health (WOAH), and APHIS does not expect their vaccination to result in impacts to poultry trade.

This emergency use approval is limited to the endangered California condors. USDA Agricultural Research Service scientists continue to research vaccine options that could protect U.S. poultry from HPAI, should vaccination be necessary for additional birds in the United States. Currently, biosecurity measures remain the best, most effective tool for mitigating the virus in commercial flocks, and improved biosecurity measures by the commercial industry have vastly reduced the number of detections compared to previous outbreaks. For example, in March 2022, there were a total of 51 commercial poultry HPAI detections. In March 2023, there were 7 commercial poultry detections, a decrease of 85% from the previous year. In April 2023, there were just two commercial cases of HPAI, compared to 106 cases in April 2022. More information about APHIS' efforts to work with industry as well as state and other federal partners to manage the outbreak can be found [here](#).

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