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USDA Confirms Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Dairy Herd in New Mexico

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Press Release

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WASHINGTON, April 1, 2024 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has confirmed the detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in a dairy herd in New Mexico, as well as 5 additional dairy herds in Texas. APHIS [shared on Fri., March 29](#) that its National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa, was working to confirm presumptive positive test results from New Mexico, Texas and Idaho herds; this announcement is a follow up to that information.

This marks the first known case of HPAI in cattle in New Mexico, and adds to the two detections in Texas that were first announced on Monday, March 25. To date, USDA has confirmed the detection of HPAI in dairy herds in Texas (7) Kansas (2), Michigan (1), and New Mexico (1). The presumptive positive test results for the Idaho herd are still pending analysis at NVSL.

APHIS continues to work closely with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as state veterinary and

public health officials, to investigate and diagnose activities regarding the illness in dairy cows causing decreased lactation, low appetite, and other clinical signs.

USDA and federal and state partners will continue to share additional updates as information becomes available. APHIS has also prepared a Frequently Asked Questions document, which can be accessed [here](#).

In addition, today, the CDC [reported](#) that a person in Texas has tested positive for HPAI A(H5N1) virus; the CDC also stated in its announcement that this infection does not change the A(H5N1) bird flu human health risk assessment for the U.S. general public, which CDC considers to be low. However, people with close or prolonged, unprotected exposures to infected birds or other animals (including livestock), or to environments contaminated by infected birds or other animals, are at greater risk of infection. CDC [has interim recommendations](#) for prevention, monitoring, and public health investigations of HPAI A(H5N1) viruses.

Federal and state agencies continue to conduct additional testing in swabs from sick animals and in unpasteurized clinical milk samples from sick animals, as well as viral genome sequencing, to assess whether HPAI or another unrelated disease may be underlying any symptoms.

The NVSL has also confirmed that the strain of the virus found in subsequent states is very similar to the strain originally confirmed in cattle in Texas and Kansas that appears to have been introduced by wild birds (H5N1, Eurasian lineage goose/Guangdong clade 2.3.4.4b). Initial testing has not found changes to the virus that would make it more transmissible to humans. While cases among humans in direct contact with infected animals are possible, this indicates that the current risk to the public remains low.

There continues to be no concern that this circumstance poses a risk to consumer health, or that it affects the safety of the commercial milk supply because products are pasteurized before entering the market. Dairies are required to send only milk from healthy animals into processing for human consumption; milk from impacted animals is being diverted from the commercial milk tank or destroyed so that it does not enter the human food supply. In addition, pasteurization has continually proven to inactivate bacteria and viruses, like influenza, in milk. Pasteurization is required for any milk entering interstate commerce for human consumption. FDA's longstanding position is that unpasteurized, raw milk can harbor dangerous

microorganisms that can pose serious health risks to consumers, and FDA is reminding consumers of the risks associated with raw milk consumption in light of the HPAI detections.

Because of the limited information available about the transmission of HPAI in raw milk, the FDA recommends that industry does not manufacture or sell raw milk or raw/unpasteurized milk cheese products made with milk from cows showing symptoms of illness, including those infected with avian influenza or exposed to those infected with avian influenza. At this time, the FDA is not aware that any milk or dairy product from symptomatic cows is entering interstate commerce.

Furthermore, if milk from cows showing symptoms of illness or exposed to those infected with avian influenza, is intended to be used to feed calves or other animals, FDA strongly encourages that it be pasteurized or otherwise heat treated to kill harmful bacteria or viruses, such as influenza, before calf feeding. Food safety information from FDA, including information about the sale and consumption of raw milk, can be found [here](#).

Milk loss resulting from symptomatic cattle to date is too limited to have a major impact on supply and there should be no impact on the price of milk or other dairy products. Further, the U.S. typically has a more than sufficient milk supply in the spring months due to seasonally higher production.

Federal agencies are also working with state and industry partners to encourage producers and veterinarians to report cattle illnesses quickly so that we can monitor potential additional cases and minimize the impact and risk to farmers, farmworkers, consumers and other animals. Producers are urged to work with their veterinarian to report cattle illnesses quickly and practice enhanced biosecurity measures. More information on biosecurity measures can be found [here](#).