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USDA Confirms Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Backyard Poultry Flock in Puerto Rico

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Stakeholder Announcement

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WASHINGTON, January 13, 2025 – The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has confirmed the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in a backyard poultry flock in Puerto Rico. This is the first case of HPAI in domestic birds in Puerto Rico during this outbreak, which began in February 2022.

Samples from the flock were tested and confirmed at the APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa.

APHIS is working closely with animal health officials in Puerto Rico on a joint incident response and will provide appropriate support as requested.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [the public health risk associated with these avian influenza detections in birds remains low](#). As a reminder, the proper handling and cooking of all poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165°F is recommended as a general food safety precaution.

As part of existing avian influenza response plans, APHIS and the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture are conducting additional surveillance and testing in areas around the affected flock. The United States has the strongest AI surveillance program in the world, and USDA is working with its partners to actively look for the disease in commercial poultry operations, live bird markets and in migratory wild bird populations.

Anyone involved with poultry production from the small backyard to the large commercial producer should review their biosecurity activities to assure the health of their birds. Visit [APHIS' Defend the Flock Resource Center](#) for materials about biosecurity, including videos, checklists, and a toolkit.

USDA will report these findings to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) as well as international trading partners. USDA also continues to communicate with trading partners to encourage adherence to WOAH standards and minimize trade impacts. WOAH trade guidelines call on countries to base trade restrictions on sound science and, whenever possible, limit restrictions to those animals and animal products within a defined region that pose a risk of spreading disease of concern. WOAH trade guidelines also call on member countries to not impose bans on the international trade of poultry commodities in response to notifications in non-poultry.

All cases in commercial and backyard flocks are listed on the [APHIS website](#).

In addition to practicing good biosecurity, all bird owners should prevent contact between their birds and wild birds and report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to State/Federal officials, either through their state veterinarian or through APHIS' toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593. APHIS urges producers to consider bringing birds indoors, when possible, to further prevent exposures. The Animal Health Protection

Act authorizes APHIS to provide indemnity payments to producers for birds and eggs that must be depopulated during a disease response. APHIS also provides compensation for disposal activities and virus elimination activities. Additional information on biosecurity for backyard flocks can be found on [APHIS' Defend the Flock webpage](#).

Additional background

Avian influenza (AI) is caused by an influenza type A virus which can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and is carried by free flying waterfowl such as ducks, geese and shorebirds. AI viruses are classified by a combination of two groups of proteins: hemagglutinin or “H” proteins, of which there are 16 (H1–H16), and neuraminidase or “N” proteins, of which there are 9 (N1–N9). Many different combinations of “H” and “N” proteins are possible. Each combination is considered a different subtype and can be further broken down into different strains which circulate within flyways/geographic regions. AI viruses are further classified by their pathogenicity (low or high)—the ability of a particular virus strain to produce disease in domestic poultry.

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