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Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Provides Guidance Regarding Avian Influenza

This message is for all Pennsylvanians who own poultry and outdoor birds of any kind. A highly pathogenic avian influenza (AI) is working its way toward the East Coast due to birds, mostly wild waterfowl, sharing the virus when they come in contact with each other during seasonal migration. The virus does not make the waterfowl ill nor does it make humans ill, but it is proving to be deadly to poultry, including turkeys.

Commercial and backyard poultry have been infected from contact with wild birds in a number of states already and the flocks have experienced very high mortality. To date, this virus (strain H5N2) has affected both commercial and backyard bird flocks in the states of Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas and Arkansas. Infected and exposed birds in those flocks, which were not killed by the virus, had to be depopulated in order to stop further spread of disease in the impacted areas.

It is now apparent that the virus is in birds using the Pacific and Mississippi migratory flyways. Since the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways overlap, there is real concern that migratory waterfowl in Pennsylvania may also be carrying this virus. While no virus has yet been detected during waterfowl surveillance testing in Pennsylvania, the testing has not involved a large number of birds. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture regards the current situation as being serious enough to recommend precautionary measures are taken now to minimize the threat.

During this time, it is extremely important to keep your poultry away from wild water birds and the water that they use as the virus will also live in that water anywhere from days to weeks. This would include large puddles, small and large ponds, or streams on your property. It is best to keep your birds within a building or a screened-in enclosure which will completely prevent contact with or entrance of wild birds. Because this virus will most likely be circulating in migratory waterfowl for several years, poultry and outdoor birds need be kept in confinement for the foreseeable future.

If you allow outdoor access for organic certification, contact your certifying agency and discuss the risks. For certified poultry technicians, making multiple flock visits, take the necessary precautions to avoid carrying disease into a flock.

If your flock is participating in an AI surveillance program, be sure to get your testing done as required. If you are interested in joining a surveillance program, contact the Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services' (BAHDS) poultry health section at 717-783-6897 or 717-783-6677.

If you suspect your poultry has been impacted by AI, feel free to call the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture at 717-772-2852 to report it. The line is available 24-hours-a-day.

The department will continue to monitor this situation and will provide continued guidance and outreach.