USDA Key Messages for Avian Influenza
Scenario 2: Highly Pathogenic H5N1 Avian Influenza Detection in Wild Birds

Educating the media and the public about the complexities of avian influenza as a disease among birds is one of USDA's primary communications objectives.

As part of this effort, USDA, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of the Interior, and Department of Homeland Security, have developed three scenarios in the event of a detection and/or outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in the United States.

The scenarios are:
1) a highly pathogenic avian influenza detection in the United States;
2) a highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza detection in wild birds; and
3) a highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza detection in commercial poultry

Each of these scenarios contains a series of key questions and answers about animal health, guidance for the public, as well as a summary of the actions USDA would take in the event of a highly pathogenic avian influenza detection in the United States.

Scenario 2: Highly Pathogenic H5N1 Avian Influenza Detection in Wild Birds - Key

2-1 In the event of a highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI) detection in wild birds, what advice would you give to bird hunters?
2-2 What would you do to protect domestic flocks if the HPAI H5N1 detection is near a commercial poultry operation?
2-3 What would be done in response to a detection of HPAI H5N1 in wild birds?
2-4. What would the next steps be in the event of the HPAI H5N1 detection?
2-5. In the event of an HPAI H5N1 detection in wild birds, who would be in charge?
2-6. Who else would be involved in the response?
2-7. What if more infected birds were found?
2-8. In the event of a HPAI H5N1 wild bird detection, could the situation remain under control?
2-9. Would it be safe to clean and eat wild birds?
2-10. What could I do to protect my pets if there was an HPAI H5N1 detection in wild birds?
2-11. Should I be concerned about getting HPAI H5N1 from an aviary or pet store?

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2-1 In the event of a highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI) detection in wild birds, what advice would you give to bird hunters?

Hunters need to take precautions when handling wild game. They should wear gloves and wash hands with soap and warm water after handling wild birds and disinfect any materials that come into contact with dead birds.

If hunters find dead birds, they can help by reporting the find. The first point of contact should be local fish and wildlife authorities. More information about report reporting and disinfecting your equipment is at www.usda.gov/birdflu or www.avianflu.gov.

2-2 What would you do to protect domestic flocks if the HPAI H5N1 detection is near a commercial poultry operation?

USDA works with states and industry to monitor and test commercial poultry flocks for avian influenza as well as with states to monitor and test birds in live markets. We also have an education program for backyard flock owners about effective biosecurity practices – practical management practices that help prevent diseases -- for protecting birds and identifying signs of avian influenza.

USDA would:

1) coordinate enhanced wild bird surveillance in the surrounding area where the event occurred;
2) monitor potential wild bird threats to domestic poultry and assess the risk wild birds pose to the transmission of an HPAI virus to susceptible livestock and poultry; and
3) implement enhanced surveillance plan for domestic poultry.

2-3 What would be done in response to a detection of HPAI H5N1 in wild birds?

USDA, in partnership with the Department of the Interior (DOI) would increase testing for HPAI H5N1 in the area. This would help us determine which bird species were affected so that we could track the migratory path of the birds in the United States.

We would alert our federal, state, and local government partners as well as industry about the detection. The public plays a key role and could help by reporting to their state or local fish and wildlife authorities any groups of dead birds. We would track reports of dead birds to determine whether the virus is spreading in birds. Public land managers also would be alerted to increase their monitoring and educate visitors.

USDA would determine whether there are commercial poultry operations or bird markets in the area and would alert those operators to increase monitoring as a precaution. We would work with the media to help us alert backyard flock owners about the detection.

Additionally, if we determine that there are free-range bird owners in the area, we would allow them to confine their birds indoors for animal health protection while retaining their free-range marketing label.

2-4 What would the next steps be in the event of an HPAI H5N1 detection?

USDA and DOI would continue to confer with local, state and federal partners, as well as the commercial poultry industry to help get the message out. If the detection occurred in Alaska, USDA and DOI must ensure that subsistence hunters and sports hunters, wild bird rescuers, bird watchers and others have been notified of potential risks and safety precautions.

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USDA and DOI would expand the interagency bird monitoring and testing. Expanded sampling would continue to occur in the area of the detection. And experts would follow the infected bird species' flight routes based upon historical migration patterns.

2-5 In the event of an HPAI H5N1 detection in wild birds, who would be in charge?

DOI, in partnership with USDA, would lead on the wild bird response with support from other federal agencies, as well as state and local officials. Because initial sample test results could indicate an H5N1 avian influenza virus, the USDA lab in Ames, Iowa will confirm the diagnosis and pathogenicity of the virus. However, the confirmatory virus isolation testing would take 7-10 days to complete.

And, while a detection of HPAI H5N1 in wild birds would NOT signal the start of a human flu pandemic, HHS leads the federal response and preparation activities that relate to public health. HHS works closely with state and local public health experts. Every citizen has a role in preparing for the possibility for any human pandemic. More information is available at **www.pandemicflu.gov**.

2-6 Who else would be involved in the response?

Federal and state wildlife and animal health agencies would help with the response.
We would work with our international neighbors, Canada and Mexico, to assist with the wild bird monitoring.

2-7 What if more infected birds were found?

That is likely because avian influenza is transmitted bird-to bird through saliva, feces and other bodily fluids. Wherever large flocks of wild birds gather more cases might develop. Spread is possible in Alaska as birds from Asia and North America mix and after the North American birds head south to the lower 48 states through traditional flyways. Migratory birds enter North America from Asia as early as March. Wild bird managers and other organizations are proactively monitoring high-risk habitats where birds mix.

USDA would expand wild bird monitoring and environmental testing. Specifically:

1) coordinate enhanced wild bird surveillance in the surrounding area where the event occurred;
2) monitor potential wild bird threats to domestic poultry and assess the risk wild birds pose to the transmission of an HPAI virus to susceptible livestock and poultry; and
3) implement enhanced surveillance plan for domestic poultry.

2-8 In the event of a HPAI H5N1 wild bird detection, could the situation remain under control?

DOI and USDA would track the migratory path of the infected bird species and step up testing. We would continue to have hunter check stations in place to monitor for the presence of HPAI H5N1 as well as capture and test apparently healthy wild birds.

The U.S. government has several safeguards in place. Should this virus spread near commercial poultry farms or backyard flocks, USDA would activate the Incident Command System. We have great expertise in managing foreign animal disease emergencies.

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USDA's National Poultry Implementation Program enables the industry to actively test flocks. Chicken and turkey flocks are tested for avian influenza either on the farm or at the processing plants to prevent infected birds from entering the food supply.

In addition, the commercial poultry industry has firewalls in place to protect against avian influenza. They operate under established biosecurity practices that protect and prevent the introduction of new diseases onto a poultry farm. Because the industry is integrated, it is easier to eradicate the virus because in most cases the company owns or controls all aspects of the operation.

2-9 Would it be safe to clean and eat wild birds?

Yes, properly cooked game is safe to eat. Like domestic poultry, game birds are safe to eat if the internal cooking temperature reaches or exceeds 165 degrees Fahrenheit. Just remember to always follow these basic common-sense practices in order to protect yourself from any foodborne pathogens:

1) Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food;
2) Prevent cross contamination by keeping raw meat and its juices away from other foods; and
3) Cook all game birds to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit. This kills foodborne germs that might be present, such as the AI virus.

2-10 What could I do to protect my pets if there were an HPAI H5N1 detection in wild birds?

Keep your pet birds away from wild birds and their droppings. Watch for signs of avian influenza such as breathing problems, watery diarrhea and swelling around the head, neck and eyes. A loss of appetite might also occur in birds.

Pet bird owners should use good sanitary practices. Isolate new birds from your other birds for at least 30 days. Restrict access to your birds, especially from people who own birds. Clean cages, food, and water dishes on a daily basis.

Use good animal health practices with all pets. Pet birds, cats, rabbits, ferrets, rodents, and some primates are susceptible to AI virus although this is rare. Keep pets away from sick and dead birds and bird droppings. Do not feed your pets raw poultry, poultry products or eggs. If your pet suddenly dies call your veterinarian.

2-11 Should I be concerned about getting HPAI H5N1 from an aviary or pet store?

Birds imported for the purpose of becoming pets are subject to a 30-day quarantine to ensure that they do not have disease. HPAI H5N1 has a high rate of illness and death in birds so it is unlikely it would go undetected. Try to purchase birds from a reputable dealer. And if you have been around other birds, make sure that you clean your shoes, clothing, and other items. And don't forget to wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling your birds.