

Department of Agriculture

NEWS FROM THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



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Contact:

Steve Jensen

860-713-2519-office

860-983-3556- cell

Steve.Jensen@ct.gov

POULTRY OWNERS URGED TO REGISTER FLOCKS

The state Department of Agriculture today urged all poultry owners in Connecticut to register the location of their flocks with the state as a precaution to help reduce the risk of spreading a disease that has led to the disposal of more than 48 million birds in the West and Midwest since late last year.

No cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) have been detected in Connecticut - where there are an estimated 5 million poultry - or the Northeast. The virus poses a low risk to humans and the food supply.

Poultry are typically infected by direct contact with wild birds or a contaminated environment, and there is concern that the virus may spread to the Northeast during the fall or spring wild bird migration. It is also spread by the movement of infected poultry, contaminated poultry equipment, and people who can transfer the virus between farms on their shoes and clothing.

Most of Connecticut's poultry are owned by several large and medium-sized commercial egg-producing operations, with the remaining in backyard and relatively small commercial flocks.

It is particularly important that small-flock owners register with the state, because the virus typically spreads to poultry from wild birds and, once established, can grow rapidly.

Agriculture Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky said voluntary registration provides valuable

information about the locations and numbers of poultry kept in the state.

The information will be used only for emergency response purposes if HPAI is detected in Connecticut, and will help the state prepare a robust response.

“The key to limiting the spread of disease is knowing specifically where birds are being raised and having timely communication with farmers and other owners,” Reviczky said. “Registering the location of birds is a proven tool to help accomplish both goals. We strongly urge those with flocks big and small to register them. It’s an important step for farmers and for Connecticut’s HPAI response team.”

Poultry owners may register their flocks with the state by going to the homepage of the Dept. of Agriculture’s website: CTGrown.gov.

The Department of Agriculture and other state and federal agencies have created a task force that is preparing for a potential incident of HPAI in Connecticut, and is ready to implement a response plan if necessary.

The task force includes the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) – which is responsible for monitoring the wild bird population – the Department of Public Health, the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, and the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory.

The agriculture department is also working with the USDA, UConn, and the Connecticut Poultry Association to raise awareness of the virus and how to reduce the risk of its spread, and has an emergency-response plan in place if needed.

In addition to registering flocks, the state recommends the following steps to reduce the risk of spreading the virus:

- Eliminate opportunities for domestic birds to interact with wild birds by closing holes in coops and installing bird netting.
- Restrict the movement of poultry, poultry equipment and people between farms. The virus can be spread through manure, equipment, vehicles, egg flats, crates, and people whose clothing or shoes have come in contact with the virus.
- Those who must visit another premises with poultry should practice strict bio-security measures, such as wearing clean clothes and shoes, and keeping vehicles

clean and free of dirt, manure and other organic material.

- Monitor the health of birds on a regular basis and know the signs of the virus, which include high mortality, nasal discharge and respiratory distress; swelling around the head, eyes and neck; decreased consumption of food and water and a drop in egg production.

Domestic poultry are already monitored by the agriculture department in a number of ways:

- All poultry and hatching eggs imported into the state must have credentials ensuring that they are disease-free and meet other health standards.
- Large commercial poultry or egg-production operations are inspected and birds tested whenever flocks are moved.
- Poultry auctions and live markets are also inspected and tested, as are domestic birds being entered into agricultural fairs or exhibitions.
- Connecticut also has strict importation restrictions to prevent the introduction of poultry disease into the state.
- Only licensed poultry dealers may sell live poultry here.

Poultry may only be moved into Connecticut from areas known to be free of avian influenza, and must be tested for the virus before entering the state.

Imported poultry must be accompanied by an import permit, which are free and available calling the department at 860-713-2508.

Any poultry owner seeking to participate in the free quarterly avian influenza surveillance program should contact the agriculture department at 860-713-2504.

Suspected cases of HPAI may also be reported to the agriculture department at 860-713-2504, or the USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593.

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