

Avian influenza detected on a cape poultry farm

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture has confirmed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in a commercial layer poultry farm. The farm has been placed under quarantine, the Western Cape government said on Sunday. Over 10,000 chickens have already died and culling of the rest at the farm and composting of mortalities has already been started.



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"The virus has not yet been confirmed as H5N8, which is the strain in outbreaks in other parts of the country. However, the H5 typing and the nature of its effect on chickens is indicative of it being the H5N8 strain," the Minister of Economic Opportunities Alan Winde said.

The cause is most likely through contact with wild birds. Winde said the virus presents a challenge to control due to the wild birds. Avian influenza is a viral respiratory disease amongst birds, believed to be transmitted by wild migratory birds. It is primarily spread by direct contact between healthy and infected birds, or through indirect contact with contaminated equipment or other materials. The virus is present in the faeces of infected birds and in discharges from their noses, mouth, and eyes.

The H5N8 strain of the disease has already wreaked havoc in the poultry industry in Zimbabwe where thousands of commercial birds have died or had to be culled.

Winder said the vets are working hard to contain the spread in the province.

In Heidelberg, three ostrich farms have tested positive. No birds have died on the farms. The affected farms remain under quarantine.

"This is a priority for the poultry industry, and the entire agriculture sector. The outbreak and the current drought have made agriculture a tough space to be in. This is a particularly difficult time for those affected farms, which are important employers. This is why we ask all stakeholders to continue working with us to mitigate the impact of this outbreak on our economy," said Winder

The provincial government has put in place the following control measures:

Farms within a 3km zone of an infected farm will be monitored closely and subjected to the control measures as laid out by the National Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry.

It is strongly recommended that any movement of pet birds, racing pigeons, breeding birds and show birds be limited as far as possible and covered by a movement permit if coming from within 30km of an infected farm.

Sick or dead birds - both wild birds and poultry - must be reported to local state vets. Contact details can be found at <http://www.elsenburg.com/services-and-programmes/veterinary-services-0#s=Animal-Health-and-Disease-Control>

Exports of poultry and poultry products have been suspended except from poultry compartments registered with DAFF, or where a country's import permit contains clauses that are able to be signed by a certifying veterinarian.

Meanwhile, Winder said poultry products available in supermarkets and stores do not pose a risk to human health as a result of this strain of avian influenza.

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