



Health Protection Surveillance Centre

25-27 Middle Gardiner Street

Dublin, Ireland,

D01 A4A3

Ph +353 1 8765300

Fx +353 1 8561299

info@hpsc.ie

www.hpsc.ie

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Deputy Duncan Smith
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Re: PQ34534/22 To ask the Minister for Health if he will provide an up-to-date list of the advice and guidance that has been provided in the past four years by his Department to organisations within its remit in respect of the risks to human health from the H5N1 virus and similar viruses; the wildlife species that are most associated with such risks; if there has been any increase in H5N1 detections in recent years; if so, the details of the infected species; and the up-to-date co-operative arrangements that are in place with other Departments, agencies and neighbouring jurisdictions to ensure that appropriate and timely protections of human and public health are in place.

Dear Deputy Smith

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

Over the past four years (since 2018), avian influenza among birds has been confirmed on numerous occasions in Ireland by the veterinarians working with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). There have been no human cases identified with the avian influenza infection in birds (wild or farmed)

The Departments of Public Health and HPSC are informed by DAFM when birds are identified as under investigation or confirmed to have avian influenza. Alerts have been made by HSE at local/regional and national level to raise awareness of the risk to human health if sick or dead birds are handled by humans, and may be exposed to this virus if the birds have been infected.

Information leaflets and guidance on H5N1 published by HPSC are available at <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/influenza/avianinfluenza/>

The guidance on the HPSC website was prepared before four years ago to provide guidance and information in anticipation of avian influenza being identified in Ireland. The information is still current. However, in 2021 following identification of avian influenza H5N1 HPSC issued a news article <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/influenza/avianinfluenza/news/title-21640-en.html>

Migratory waterfowl (most notably wild ducks, swans, peregrine falcons) are the natural source of avian influenza viruses. Many may carry virus without adverse outcomes, but for some birds they do manifest disease and may die and are then found in the wild by members of the public of parks and wildlife staff.

Only the virus types of the H5 and H7 types are known to cause the highly pathogenic (HPAI) form of the disease. The most well-known example is the avian influenza subtype H5N1 viruses currently circulating in poultry in parts of Asia and northeast Africa, which have caused human disease and deaths since 1997. Other avian influenza subtypes, including **H7N9** and H9N2, have also infected people. Some of these infections have been very severe and some have resulted in deaths, but many infections have been mild or even without symptoms in humans.

DAFM reported the first outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza subtype H5N1 (HPAI H5N1) in poultry in Ireland on November 20, 2021. Between November 20, 2021 and December 20, 2021 six outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 were confirmed in poultry flocks in Ireland.

Swans, peregrine falcons and poultry flocks were affected – please contact DAFM for more specific information.

Table 1. Number of cases/ outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza in wild birds and poultry

Year	No. of cases in wild birds	No. of outbreaks of HPAI in poultry
2019	0	0
2020	23 (H5N8)	1 (H5N8)
2021	5 (H5N8) 2 (H5N3) 64 (H5N1)	6 (H5N1)
2022 (to 1/6/2022)	17(H5N1)	0

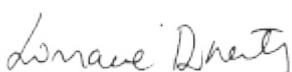
Provided by: Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

There is close working between DAFM staff and HPSC, Public Health Departments if an infected bird is identified- guidance on risk assessment of individuals exposed to the infected birds outlines the monitoring of such individuals in the days following exposure, identifies those who may require antiviral prophylaxis to prevent infection or minimise the severe illness. There are international networks through which communications and alerts regarding avian influenza identified in other jurisdictions are communicated- both in the health, agriculture, food and environment sectors. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) is made aware of the events that may impact on poultry food industry and flock owners and they monitor the situation and provide advice as well.

DAFM communicates with poultry owners and to veterinarians and wildlife staff when cases are identified. HSE communicates with members of the public via website, and other national/regional and social media alerts.

If you require any further information or clarification please do contact us.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Lorraine Doherty,
National Clinical Director for Health Protection,
HSE, Health Protection Surveillance Centre**