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Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5N1) In Poland and Germany – an update

Note: Defra's International Trade Core Function (ITCF) monitors outbreaks of high impact diseases around the world. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is among those diseases of major concern.

Disease report

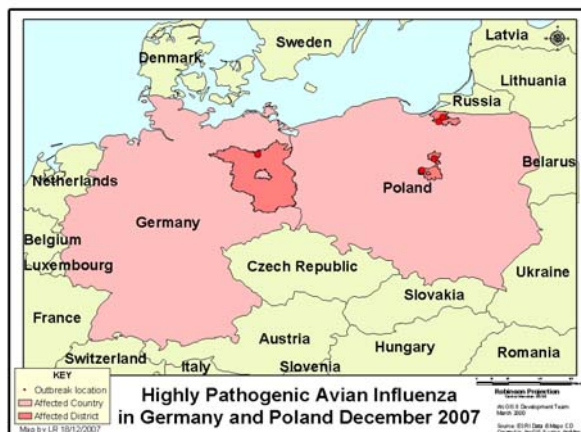
In Europe, Poland has confirmed further outbreaks of avian influenza HPAI (H5N1) in commercial layer hens (European Commission, 2007a), wild birds kept in a shelter (European Commission, 2007b & c) and backyard hens and ducks (European Commission, 2007d). Some of these appear to be related to the initial outbreaks, either through worker transmission or transport of affected birds just before the outbreaks were first detected. These new outbreaks are located in the Plocki, Zurominski and Elblaski districts of central and north-central Poland (see map). Control measures have been extended in accordance with EC rules.

Germany has also confirmed an outbreak of avian influenza HPAI (H5N1) in a small backyard flock of hens (OIE, 2007). The outbreak is located in Brandenburg (see map). Control measures are in place in accordance with EC rules.

Situation assessment

As reported previously, Germany, France and Czech Republic reported cases of H5N1 HPAI in wild birds in various locations during the summer of 2007. There were also

outbreaks in domestic poultry in central Germany, the Czech Republic and more recently in the UK (Great Britain), Poland and Romania. In addition, Germany, France and Czech Republic reported cases of H5N1 HPAI in wild birds in various locations during the summer of 2007.



These outbreaks appear to provide further evidence that avian influenza (H5N1) virus may be present in wild bird populations in a number of discrete pockets and may be circulating at a very low level that is difficult to detect. Sporadic outbreaks of H5N1 may

therefore continue to occur within Europe since local or migratory bird movements may possibly carry the disease to unaffected regions over time.

Phylogenetic analysis of H5N1 HPAI viruses associated with outbreaks in poultry since June 2007 in the Czech Republic, Germany (June/July), Romania, United Kingdom and Poland indicates the viruses are very closely related with nucleotide homologies in the range 99.4 to 100%. In addition, a single wild bird isolate (A/mute swan/ Czech Republic/1787/07) clusters most closely with the virus from Romania (A/chicken/Romania/10750/07) with a nucleotide homology of 99.9%. These results indicate that initial incursion from wild birds to poultry remains a real possibility but subsequent occurrences of poultry outbreaks in the wider

region is subject to uncertainty with spread mediated via poultry contact or through wild birds (Ian Brown, VLA, Personal Comment).

Intra-Community trade in live poultry and poultry meat is subject to EU rules. The outbreaks in Poland have been subject to epidemiological investigation. The affected flock in Germany was kept for home consumption only and no trade activity has taken place in this case. The European Commission TRACES electronic database does not record any shipments of live poultry or hatching eggs from the affected areas.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above report and our previous risk assessments we consider that these recent HPAI outbreaks in Europe do not significantly alter our previous overall conclusion that there is an increased but still low likelihood that the virus may be introduced from the currently affected areas to the UK.

At this stage, the likelihood of the introduction of the virus from Germany to the UK via legal importation of live poultry would appear to be negligible. However, we will review this in the light of any further developments.

This outbreak once again emphasises the importance of maintaining high biosecurity standards with regard to domestic poultry, especially in areas where migratory birds may seasonally congregate.

On the basis of this and previous outbreaks, further developments may be likely and we will continue to monitor and review the overall situation.

References

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