



**Gary W. Black**  
Commissioner

# Georgia Department of Agriculture

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March 16, 2017

## MEMO:

To: All Georgia Poultry Producers

From: Robert M. Cobb, Jr., DVM  
State Veterinarian

## SUBJECT:

**Effective immediately all poultry exhibitions, shows, sales (flea markets, auction markets), swaps, and meets in the State of Georgia are suspended until further notice.**

## ACTION:

**Avian Influenza (HPAI or LPAI) has NOT been found in Georgia poultry.** However, due to the recent confirmations of Avian Influenza in Tennessee and reported investigations in Alabama and in an effort to minimize the risk of introduction of HPAI (or LPAI) into our Georgia poultry flocks, it is recommended for all Georgia Poultry Producers and Enthusiasts (commercial and backyard) to observe the following:

1. Implement **STRICT BIOSECURITY** on all poultry premises. Alert all company personnel, growers, farm workers and service personnel of the increased risk of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Focus biosecurity methods on preventing any exposure to wild waterfowl or their droppings. Keep up your biosecurity **AT ALL TIMES**, especially as it relates to **ESSENTIAL** visitors and **ENTRY** biosecurity.
2. All outdoor poultry should be moved into bio-secure housing and any contact with wild birds of any kind, especially waterfowl, their habitat, or their droppings should be avoided. If this is not possible, the Georgia Department of Agriculture should be notified.
3. If you use rendering for dead poultry disposal, please verify that the trucks are disinfected at each pick up and that the freezer area is kept clean and clutter free. If you use rendering pick up for livestock, please do the same. If you visit a rendering plant for any livestock, clean and disinfect your vehicle before returning to your farm.

4. Take the necessary precautions around any congregation points for growers or backyard owners – do not bring disease back to your poultry.
5. Monitor all flocks for increased mortality or clinical signs consistent with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), and report any concerns immediately. The consistent clinical sign in all the current reported cases to this point has been a marked rapid increase in mortality over several days.
6. Enroll in the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP).
7. Please contact the HPAI HOTLINE for reporting of sick birds or for questions related to HPAI.

Georgia Department of Agriculture [www.ga-ai.org](http://www.ga-ai.org) (855) 491-1432  
Georgia Poultry Laboratory [www.gapoultrylab.org](http://www.gapoultrylab.org) (770) 766-6850

## **CURRENT EVENTS:**

- On March 16, 2017, a second commercial poultry premises was confirmed with H7N9, HPAI, in Lincoln County, Tennessee. This premise is located less than two (2) miles away and in the same control zone as the March 5, 2017, H7N9, HPAI premise in Lincoln County, Tennessee. The infected poultry are depopulated and surveillance is on-going.
- As of March 14, 2017, three separate avian influenza investigations on three separate premises (one commercial and 2 backyard) are currently underway in Alabama. Confirmation of subtype is pending. Surveillance is on-going. The most recent investigation involved routine surveillance at a flea market.
- On March 8, 2017, Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI), H7N9, was confirmed in commercial poultry in Giles County, Tennessee. All poultry on the premise has been depopulated and surveillance is on-going.
- On March 4, 2017, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), H7N9, was confirmed in Lincoln County, Tennessee in commercial poultry. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture, with USDA support, responded to contain the virus; all birds were depopulated and properly disposed. A Control Zone that calls for strict movement control of poultry and poultry related products, poultry feed and supplies, has been established around the affected premise. Surveillance is on-going. The control zone extends into portions of Northern Alabama.

\* It is important to note that both the HPAI H7N9 and the LPAI H7N9 confirmed in Tennessee is of North American Wild Bird origin and is **NOT** related to the Asian H7N9 virus. While the subtype is the same as the China H7N9 lineage that emerged in 2013, this is a different virus and is genetically distinct from the China H7N9 lineage.

\* Avian Influenza, HPAI and LPAI, do **NOT** present a food safety concern. All commercial poultry are tested prior to going to market. No affected commercial poultry will enter the food chain. While backyard poultry may not be tested prior to processing, proper handling and cooking of poultry will destroy the virus. The risk of human infection with avian influenza during poultry outbreaks is very low.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Avian influenza viruses are classified by proteins of the virus: “H” proteins, of which there are 16 (H1–H16), and “N” proteins, of which there are 9 (N1–N9). Many different combinations of “H” and “N” proteins are possible. Like all influenza viruses, avian influenza viruses are known to easily re-assort and mutate (to change) into new avian influenza subtypes. They even can change in their ability to infect within a subtype. Only H7 and H5 subtypes have been found to change from LPAI to HPAI.

Avian Influenza (LPAI) normally resides in the North American wild bird population. Wild waterfowl (ducks, geese and shore birds) are known to be carriers of the virus. They do not get sick, but spread it wherever they go. Any contact with wild birds of any kind, especially waterfowl, their habitat or their droppings, should be avoided. The virus is shed in the droppings and by direct contact.

Georgia is associated with the Atlantic migratory flyway. Since July 2016, over 2000 wild birds have been tested for avian influenza in the Atlantic flyway and eighteen (18) LPAI positives were found.

In 2014 and 2015, HPAI, H5N8 and H5N2, caused the largest animal disease outbreak in United States history. This outbreak affected commercial and back-yard poultry, captive wild birds and wild birds. The outbreak affected 21 states, caused over 50 million bird deaths and cost an estimated 3 billion dollar economic impact. This outbreak was caused by an Asian lineage avian HPAI virus brought by wild waterfowl from Asia. The virus re-assorted with a North American subtype to produce HPAI in the USA. Factors involved with the spread of the virus included wild waterfowl migration and breakdowns in biosecurity.

In 2016, HPAI, H7N8, and LPAI, H7N8, infected several premises in Indiana and caused the loss of 43,000 commercial poultry. The viruses were identified as North American origin. It is thought that the LPAI, H7N8 mutated into HPAI, H7N8.