THREE BALD EAGLES TEST POSITIVE FOR HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA IN VERMONT

April 14, 2022 | Montpelier, VT – With the unfortunate discovery of three deceased bald eagles, one in North Hero and two in Shelburne on March 29, Vermont joined 33 other states across the country in detecting highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in the environment.

The bald eagles were found near Lake Champlain in both towns. Sampling was conducted by USDA Wildlife Services and tests were conducted for presence of HPAI at the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa. The discovery reinforces the important public message of awareness and vigilance for poultry owners, farmers, and hunters and outdoors recreationists to not only report sick and dead birds, but to recognize the dangers of HPAI to our small backyard poultry owners and commercial operators.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considers the risk to the general public from this HPAI virus to be low, but the virus is deadly to domestic and commercial poultry and backyard birds. All bird owners are strongly encouraged to review the below biosecurity measures to help protect their flocks.

For the agriculture community and poultry owners:

The HPAI virus is often initially introduced to domestic poultry by infected wild birds, through direct contact or contact with their droppings, and then may spread between poultry flocks due to poor biosecurity and/or unfavorable environmental conditions. While some waterfowl species can carry the disease without becoming sick, the HPAI virus is generally fatal for domestic poultry. Risk factors for the spread of HPAI include:

- Poultry housed outside
- Ponds or other wild bird attractants on the farm
- Piles of debris located close to poultry areas
- Introduction of poultry from other farms without a quarantine period
- Lack of personal protective equipment such as dedicated coveralls and boots
- Sharing of equipment between farms
- Unrestricted human movement and interaction with poultry
Anyone involved with poultry production, from the small backyard coop to the large commercial producer, should review their biosecurity activities to ensure the health of their birds, restrict human movement onto the farm and limit contact with poultry to only those who need to be there. Non-essential personnel and visitors should not be allowed.

USDA has materials about biosecurity, including videos, checklists, and a toolkit available here. In addition to practicing good biosecurity, all bird owners should prevent contact between their birds and wild birds and report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to State/Federal officials, at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets at 802-828-2421 or through USDA’s toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593 as soon as possible. Additional information on biosecurity for backyard flocks can be found here.

For the fish and wildlife community:

If you hunt wild fowl during Vermont’s available hunting seasons, please keep these tips in mind. Make sure to review the department’s avian influenza bulletin under the wildlife diseases section of our website for the most up to date information on reporting possible cases and safety measures.

For Vermonters:

No human infections with this HPAI virus have been detected in the United States, and Vermonters may take these steps to prevent infection. Influenza in poultry does not constitute a food safety risk. Vermonters are asked to be alert for dead or sick birds and to alert the USDA or Vermont authorities at 802-828-2421 or through USDA’s toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593 as soon as possible.

- For more details on the national cases, visit the USDA website at: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/2022-hpai
- Find the USDA toolkit for biosecurity at: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/defend-the-flock-program/dtf-resources/dtf-resources
- Find additional backyard biosecurity information at: https://healthybirds.aphis.usda.gov

Please contact us with any thoughts or concerns you may have. Thank you again for your assistance.

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