

## Current situation on the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza

(13/01) On 27 March 2024, the European Commission published Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/963 in the EU Official Journal L concerning emergency measures in relation to outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza in certain Member States following the recent HPAI outbreaks in **Bulgaria** (in the Pazardzhik region), and in **Sweden** (in Svedala Municipality).

The annex to the decision (EU) 2024/963 contains the updated territorial outlines of the protection and surveillance zones as well as the provisional duration of the protective measures.

Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/963, which has now been published, amends Implementing Decision (EU) 2023/2447 accordingly. Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/963 is available at the following link: [http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec\\_impl/2024/963/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2024/963/oj)

## EFSA/ECDC: Overview of avian influenza December 2023 to March 2024

(13/02) On 28 March 2024, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) published another quarterly report on avian influenza for the period December 2023 to March 2024. According to the report, HPAI's epidemic has been more benign compared to the same period last year. Between 2 December 2023 and 15 March 2024, outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in domestic (227) and wild birds (414) were reported in 26 European countries. Compared to previous years, the total number of HPAI detections in birds was significantly lower, partly due to some degree of flock immunity in previously affected wild bird species and a different composition of circulating A(H5N1) genotypes. This resulted in less contamination of the environment. Most of the reported HPAI outbreaks in poultry have been primary outbreaks following the introduction of the virus by wild birds. However, transmission from one farm to another has also been observed. According to EFSA, significant risks arise from shared equipment and direct neighbourhoods. According to the report, farms with the same farmer also have an increased risk.

In France, where preventive vaccination against A(H5) viruses has been implemented since October 2023, targeting the duck production sector with compulsory vaccination (with the exception of duck breeders), most of the outbreaks reported in poultry (8 out of 10, since the beginning of the current epidemiological year) occurred in unvaccinated poultry establishments. In addition, no outbreaks were detected in Southwest France, where there were recurring epizootics in areas of high-density duck establishments in previous epidemiological years (since 2020–2021). In the two infected establishments holding vaccinated Muscovy ducks, increased mortality was observed, which provides an indication that increased mortality can still be an indicator of HPAI virus suspicions in vaccinated flocks where vaccination was not fully effective.

Outside Europe, most HPAI outbreaks in poultry are still concentrated in North America. The severe HPAI outbreak in poultry in the United States of America and Canada continued on a high level and accounted now for almost 80% of the reported outbreaks in domestic birds worldwide. This is most likely related to the return of migrating wild birds from South America to the breeding areas in North America. The HPAI virus detections in both domestic and wild birds in South America even on a lower level may indicate continuous circulation of HPAI viruses among migratory wild bird species on the continent. In contrast to the Americas, the number of HPAI virus detections notified in domestic poultry and wild birds from Asia increased during this reporting period. Furthermore, in addition to the widespread subtype A(H5N1), subtypes A(H5N6) and A(H5N5) have also been detected in Japan and South Korea as well as in wild birds in Japan, respectively.

The full report with extensive graphs and statistics is available at the following link:  
<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/de/efsajournal/pub/8754>

### **France deploys second vaccine against avian influenza**

(13/03) In France, a new vaccine is to be used to vaccinate ducks against avian influenza. In the case of the reorder of about 61 million vaccine doses, the Ministry of Agriculture has contracted the French manufacturer Ceva Santé Animale to supply a little less than half of the total quantity. A total of 34.2 million doses will again be provided by Boehringer Ingelheim. The German company had already been awarded the contract for the 80 million vaccine doses needed to launch the campaign last autumn.

According to the company, Boehringer's vaccine is based on inactivated subunits of the virus of the H5 subtype. The vaccine is approved for Mulard, Muscovy and Peking ducks. The animals are immunized by means of a subcutaneous injection. According to Boehringer, the vaccine has been on the market for almost ten years and has been administered to more than one billion birds.

### **USA: Humans infected with bird flu after contact with cattle**

(13/04) In the USA, the H5N1 virus was first detected in dairy cows at the end of March. The cows were probably infected by wild birds, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Now a person has tested positive for avian influenza in the US state of Texas. The person had previously contact with dairy cows suspected of being infected with the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus, the US health authority CDC announced last week. The affected person had indicated redness of the eyes as the only symptom, which was similar to conjunctivitis. He had been instructed to isolate himself, had been given an antiviral medication and was on the road to recovery. The person in Texas is the second recorded case of bird flu in humans in the United States. The first case occurred in 2022 in the state of Colorado.

The CDC continues to classify the risk of infection with avian influenza for humans in the U.S. as low. The agency says it is working with health authorities to monitor and test potential high-risk patients after contact with potentially infected birds or livestock. Like influenza in humans, avian influenza is caused by influenza viruses, but by various other subtypes. The largest wave of avian influenza ever documented is currently raging, covering almost the entire world, and also affecting Europe. The pathogen mainly affects birds, but has also been found in many mammals, including cats, bears and seals. Human infections occur only sporadically. Health experts warn of the danger that the virus will adapt to humans and can then also be transmitted from person to person.

According to the President of the Friedrich Loeffler Institute, Prof. Dr. Christa Kühn, given the presumed wide distribution and high viral load in wild birds and poultry in the USA, cases in cattle are very unusual, but not completely excluded. The possibility of an infection in humans occurring under these circumstances in close contact with infected animals can also not be ruled out and has been described in extremely rare individual cases with the current H5N1 virus strains following contact with infected poultry. The routes of transmission in the respective cases in cattle and humans in the USA must now be closely examined and, in particular, the situation with kept animals must continue to be closely monitored. In Germany and Europe, there are no indications of such cases so far.

According to FLI, it has not yet been conclusively clarified whether there was transmission from cow to cow in the USA. The data from the cases in the USA must be analysed in order to better classify the unusual situation and to understand possible routes of infection and causes. From this, targeted measures can also be derived for Germany. A general monitoring of HPAIV H5 infections in cattle is not planned in Germany in the current situation. HPAIV H5N1 is an animal disease and potential zoonotic pathogen. Strict precautionary measures would be taken in the event of cases in dairy cow herds in Germany. These

aim to contain possible further spread as efficiently as possible and to protect against human infections. Possible measures range from transport restrictions (milk, animals) to herd closures and extensive sampling. There are currently no plans for the precautionary culling of animals in affected herds.

### **Amendment to the lists of third countries for imports of poultry commodities from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States**

(13/05) Annexes V and XIV to Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/404 as regards the entries for Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States in the lists of third countries authorised for the entry into the Union of consignments of poultry, germinal products of poultry, and fresh meat and meat products from poultry and game birds has been amended again in relation to highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). The corresponding Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/1020 has been published in the Official Journal L on 2 April 2024.

The **United States** have notified the Commission of an outbreak of HPAI in poultry in the state of South Dakota, which was confirmed on 12 March 2024.

With the implementing regulation that has now been published, the EU Commission has suspended the entry into the Union of consignments of poultry, germinal products of poultry, and fresh meat of poultry and game birds from that area mentioned in the United States.

Moreover, **Canada** has submitted updated information on the epidemiological situation in relation to two outbreaks of HPAI in a poultry establishment in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, which were confirmed on 11 October and 25 November 2023.

Furthermore, the **United Kingdom** have submitted updated information on the epidemiological situation in relation to an outbreak of HPAI in the county of Yorkshire, England, which was confirmed on 14 February 2024.

The Commission has evaluated the information submitted by Canada and the United Kingdom. The Commission considers that Canada and the United Kingdom have provided appropriate guarantees that the animal health situation that gave rise to the suspensions, no longer represents a threat to animal or public health within the Union, and that, consequently, the entry into the Union of poultry commodities from the concerned zones of Canada and the United Kingdom from which entry into the Union had been suspended, should be reauthorised.

Furthermore, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/748 (4) amended the entries for the United States in Part 1 of Section B of Annex V, and in Part 1 of Section B of Annex XIV to Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/404 by setting opening dates for the previously closed zones US-2.528 and US-2.529 of that third country. An error has now been detected in the rows for those zones, as amended by point 1(a)(xiv) and point 2(n) of the Annex to Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/748. The correction of the entries for the United States in the rows for the zones US-2.528 and US-2.529 in Part 1 of Section B of Annex V, and in Part 1 of Section B of Annex XIV to Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/404 should apply from the date of entry into force of Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/748, namely 24 February 2024.

Annexes V and XIV to Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/404 were amended accordingly to take account of the current epidemiological situation as regards HPAI in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/1020 entered into force on 3 April 2024 and is available at the following link: [http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg\\_impl/2024/1020/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_impl/2024/1020/oj)

### **Current situation on African swine fever**

(13/06) On 22 March, Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/968 laying down specific control measures for African swine fever (ASF) and amending Annex I to Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/594 was published in the Official Journal L. Previously, there had been new outbreaks of ASF in wild porcine animals in **Czechia, Italy, Poland** and **Slovakia**. In addition, the disease situation has improved in certain areas listed in Annex I to Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/594 as restricted zones III in Latvia and Lithuania and as restricted zones I and II in Poland with regard to kept pigs and feral pigs.

Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/968 is available at the following link:

[http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg\\_impl/2024/968/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_impl/2024/968/oj)

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