

Q&A From Lunch and Learn: What Hobby Poultry Flock Owners Need to Know About HPAI

(Questions submitted by participants; answers are current as of 2/18/2025)

Q: Are egg layers disproportionately impacted?

A: The issue is many egg layer operations are larger, so bird numbers seem high. When we look at the type of premises, this year we have a higher proportion of layers. In the past, we have had more turkey premises affected. It varies from year to year.

Q: How long does HPAI survive outside of the body in different times of the year? i.e., 3 days in 30°F weather vs 3 hours in 90°F?

A: Depending on where the virus is located, the temperature, and other conditions have an impact on how hardy the virus is. Flu viruses do not survive well in the environment outside of a living host. In general, we know that we can easily dispose of that virus with soap and water.

Q: What testing modality is being used to evaluate food sources?

A: Commercial poultry farms are regularly tested for influenza to maintain a flock status of HPAI-free. This is important for market access. Food is not specifically being tested for HPAI--other than surveillance of milk on dairy farms to determine exposure.

Q: Suggestions for quarantine after showing or purchasing new birds to add to the flock?

A: If you have the capacity, try to establish a separate area to house poultry returning from an exhibition entirely away from the remainder of your flock. Observe the birds for 7 to 10 days for signs of illness. Feed, water and handle the home flock before caring for the birds that have traveled.

Q: Is there a HPAI vaccine for chickens?

A: While vaccines are being developed, currently no vaccine is approved for use in poultry. Agreements with international trading partners prevent use of the vaccine in the USA because other countries do not differentiate between exposed from vaccine vs. infected by the virus. That would give the USA a affected status that would halt access to markets for Indiana products.

Q: Do you foresee restrictions on poultry for local 4h fairs?

A: At this time, BOAH has no plans for broad restrictions. The agency is watching the situation closely, and a different decision could be made at a later time. BOAH does request that exhibition events NOT be held in Control Areas. (Consult the BOAH website for a list of active Control Areas.)

Q: What are symptoms of HPAI?

A: Signs include: sudden death without clinical signs; lack of energy or appetite; decreased egg production; soft-shelled or misshapen eggs; swelling or purple discoloration of head, eyelids, comb, hocks; nasal discharge; coughing; sneezing; lack of coordination; and diarrhea.

Q: Is it safe to give exotic/pet birds outside access?

A: They are going to be susceptible when let outside. Every time they are outdoors, you increase that potential risk and opportunity for virus introduction. Best advice is: "Don't do it."

Q: Since it does not seem that this disease will be going away anytime soon, should we as 4-H leaders be encouraging more members in poultry to get a premises ID?

A: Yes. BOAH encourages registration of poultry premises which allows the agency to notify flock owners if a disease breaks happens nearby. Small flock premises within a 10-km Control Area (around a HPAI detection site) are notified and offered extra measures to keep your birds healthy.

Q: What is proper disposal?

A: On a small (backyard) scale, double-bagging and disposal in residential trash is acceptable. Burial is fine, too. Other methods are used for larger-scale detections.

Q: Is composting sufficient to kill the virus?

A: Yes! If done properly, the heat generated will kill the virus. Composting is an important method of disposal for HPAI-affected carcasses, manure and other materials such as feed.

Q: Is ordering baby chicks from a hatchery safe.

A: Mail order hatcheries, as well as chicks offered by most chain farm-supply stores are safe. These growers work to maintain disease-free flocks under the National Poultry Improvement Plan.

Q: Can we get testing of birds paid for?

A: If a flock owners suspects HPAI, he/she should contact BOAH to have a case assessment. If warranted, BOAH will collect samples for testing at no charge. Depending on resources available at the Indiana State Poultry Association and the Indiana Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (ADDL) located at Purdue University, financial assistance for testing may be available.

Q: What's the submission process for ADDL?

A: If HPAI is suspected, the owner should contact the diagnostic laboratory prior to showing up with the birds. ADDL staff will collect essential information and tell you how to proceed with bringing the birds to the facility.

Q: Can a citizen still submit a chicken, duck or other backyard poultry directly to ADDL without a veterinarian? (Is the species limited?)

A: Yes, citizens may submit backyard poultry species to the ADDL for necropsy without a veterinarian. The owner should contact the ADDL before coming to the lab or submitting so a history of the bird(s) can be collected.

Q: What fee, if any, is there to submit?

A: Depending on the history, an ADDL pathologist will recommend the appropriate necropsy procedure. This fee may range from \$10 per bird up to \$230 for a comprehensive necropsy. If the owner is unable to pay for the testing, the case information will be shared with the Indiana State Poultry Association to determine eligibility for fee coverage (including AI testing).

Q: If a veterinarian makes a submission, either necropsy or swabs, is there a fee? Is the submission process like any other submission, or do you need BOAH authorization?

A: As mentioned above with the backyard submissions, ADDL has a fee for testing. If the veterinarian has a concern about HPAI, the veterinarian should contact BOAH immediately to discuss the case and testing. For general submissions, the veterinarian should access the ADDL website to download and complete an Avian Health Submission form or Necropsy Submission form, depending on the need.