



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Organisation
for Animal Health
Founded as OIE

Standing Group of Experts on Highly Pathogenicity Avian Influenza for Europe under the GF-TADs umbrella

First Meeting (SGE HPAI-1)
2 May 2023, Teleconference (10.00-13.30)

Draft Recommendations

CONSIDERING THAT:

1. Over the last years, there has been significant increase of HPAI virus introductions to the Region with annual waves of wild birds' migration, leading to large epidemics in poultry and economic loss. The virus is continuing to evolve in these populations and present an annual cyclical threat and continuous risk to poultry production and an existing challenge to identify protective vaccines. The increase in the number of infected wild and kept birds may be a risk of infection and spill over of the HPAI virus to other animals and humans.
2. Education and awareness of all the relevant stakeholders on the risks and consequences of HPAI introduction in kept birds is essential to ensure their engagement in the prevention, surveillance and preparedness.
3. Surveillance for early detection of the disease in wild and kept birds and timely notification are of paramount importance and key elements of an efficient and effective disease prevention enabling subsequent taking of the necessary control measures to prevent the spread.
4. Biosecurity at farm level is the cornerstone tool to prevent introduction, development and spread of transmissible animal diseases like HPAI to, from and within population of kept birds.
5. A comprehensive policy in the Region aiming at quick eradication and effective control of the HPAI outbreaks in kept birds is essential to protect animal and human health and for continuation of safe trade.

THE REGIONAL GF-TADs FOR EUROPE RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. Exceptional changes in risk profile for the Region from HPAI necessitates to establish a Standing Group of Experts on HPAI (SGE HPAI) within Regional GF-TADs to review disease prevention and control options, exchange epidemiological information and best practices in the Region, and agree on optimal coordinated strategy based on the One Health approach, aiming to protect animal and human health, reduce spread and minimise economic loss of Member Countries.
2. Members ensure appropriate level of surveillance, biosecurity measures at farm level, make use of the necessary tools to prevent the spread of the disease in kept animals and continue timely reporting of avian influenza outbreaks in both wild and kept birds. In addition, surveillance needs to be engaged, in accordance with the risk, in mammalian species, in particular in carnivores, in areas with potential high environmental contamination with HPAI virus.

3. Genetic mutations increasing the risk of the virus to spill over to mammalian species should be closely followed. Information resulting from genomic monitoring of avian influenza viruses should be timely shared with WOAH Reference Laboratories for avian influenza to support early detection and rapid response to potential threats to both animal and public health.
 4. The joint efforts of Member Countries of the European region to stop the spread of HPAI in kept animals should focus on providing the science-based risk assessment aiming at assisting veterinary services of Member Countries in securing high level of animal health and safe international trade, and aim to implement ‘upstream’ prevention measure at the human-animal-environmental interface under a One Health approach, including enhanced surveillance and monitoring and action plans related to high-risk populations including wild birds, wild mammals and at-risk poultry populations.
 5. Members’ Veterinary Authorities and WOAH Reference Laboratories for avian influenza exchange information related to the development, testing and use of vaccines against HPAI and modelling activities that inform collective assessment of possible vaccination strategies and policy contributing to ensure that proper vaccination is implemented avoiding use of unreliable vaccines or wrong vaccination strategies ensuring also that surveillance in vaccinated populations is robust and capable of detecting infection with wild-type viruses.
 6. Members encourage research institutions and vaccine manufacturers to invest and collaborate on research and development of effective and safe HPAI vaccines adapted to different species of poultry in accordance with the standards in the Terrestrial Manual;
 7. Regional GF-TADs should contribute to revise the HPAI global strategy to support the regional efforts in the control and prevention of avian influenza viruses of high pathogenicity, including communication to relevant stakeholders and the general public.
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