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In the News

Only *you* can prevent the spread of HPAI

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The Center for Infectious Disease and Policy (CIDRAP) recently reported outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in British Columbia (H5N2), the Netherlands (H5N8), and India (H5N1).

The question in these outbreaks is: "How does HPAI start in one location then spread to other farms?"

Wild birds and waterfowl can spread AI viruses to different locations, with both low and high pathogenic H5 and H7 hemagglutinin type AI viruses having been isolated from various species.

This week U.S. authorities confirmed finding H5N2 and H5N8 in wild birds in Washington state.

With this knowledge, poultry producers everywhere have the responsibility of helping to prevent the spread of AI virus infection. Presently, biosecurity is the only means of AI virus prevention, as vaccination would mask serologic surveillance efforts. Vigilant surveillance is important, limiting the amount of time flocks remain without specific control methods.

Low pathogenic H5 or H7 AI viruses are capable of causing a "quiet" infection, presenting only very mild upper respiratory disease, with little or no increase in mortality. Detecting such subtle respiratory signs in a noisy poultry house proves to be very challenging and requires purposeful listening.

The initial infection, left undetected, is likely to spread to other flocks, resulting in H5 or H7 AI mutation to a highly pathogenic form. In some cases, as little as one pass to another flock can result in mutation, while other times multiple passes are required. Such is the unpredictable nature of the H5 and H7 AI viruses.

What can be done?

1. **Implement the following biosecurity practices**:
    a. Ensure your biosecurity plan is designed to prevent transfer of AI virus from one premise to another.
    b. Require all persons entering the premise to put on clean coveralls, footwear, and headgear. *Do not* remove these articles from the farm. Require hand sanitation by everyone upon entering and leaving farm.
    c. Place an effective footwear sanitation system at all building entries to prevent tracking of any AI virus picked up on footwear while on site.
    d. Clean and disinfect all equipment prior to entering a farm.
    e. Keep free-flying birds from entering houses. Attempt to minimize free-flying birds from congregating near houses or ranges. Place a net outside access areas to prevent free-flying birds from contaminating these areas.

2. **Be vigilant in detecting flocks with "low-path" AI**:
    a. Early diagnosis of low pathogenic AI allows specific measures to be set, minimizing spread to other flocks.
    b. Submit samples from flocks with unexpected respiratory signs to a diagnostic lab for detection of AI virus, which minimizes the potential time a suspect flock may remain undetected.
    c. Listen closely to flocks for unexpected respiratory noise. During the day, turn off all fans and equipment while walking the building in order to aid in purposeful listening. Visit flocks at night when birds are quiet to monitor for clinical respiratory signs.
    d. Follow programs for detection of AI such as the NPIP US H5/H7 Avian Influenza Monitored program. Some states have active surveillance programs in addition to those provisions.

To do all you can do to help prevent the spread of "high-path" AI, maintain an effective biosecurity program to minimize a low pathogenic H5 or H7 AI virus from spreading. Furthermore, be vigilant in detecting AI virus infections as soon as possible.

For news and background from CIDRAP:

http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2014/12/h5n2-h5n8-avian-flu-viruses-surface-us

http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2014/12/tests-confirm-high-path-h5n2-british-columbia-poultry