Bath & North East Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives

Briefing on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza for senior managers and elected members

14/11/22

1. Avian Influenza status in Bath and North East Somerset

On 11/11/22 a case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza was confirmed in 4 wild birds (swans) at Chew Valley Lake. The birds had been found by Bristol Water 10 days earlier and were already dead. The results of the testing carried out on behalf of the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) were received on 11/11/22 by Bristol Water.

This Briefing will provide more information about the disease and explain the role of the local authority in addressing this situation along with a range of partners.

2. What is Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza?

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is a highly infectious viral disease affecting the respiratory, digestive and / or nervous system of many species of birds. It can have mortality rates of up to 100%.

The virus occurs naturally among wild birds worldwide, particularly waterfowl that often may not present symptoms from the virus. It can easily spread to domestic birds via saliva, mucous and faeces. Cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in kept birds across GB have become prevalent in Autumn / Winter due to the migratory paths of wild birds. (National seasonal disease control measures are already in place, including a countrywide requirement to house birds kept outside and a ban on bird gatherings.)

Humans and other animals can be infected with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza through close contact with live infected birds. The cases of this occurring are extremely rare and the risk to human health is normally negligible.

3. Impact of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

Confirmed cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in poultry (including game) impact on -

- **The trading status of GB.** All cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in poultry must be reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health. This means GB loses its disease-free status until certain restrictions have been applied. A large number of infected premises or lack of effective control measures could result in trade restrictions across the GB poultry / egg industry.

- **Local businesses.** All poultry businesses in controlled zones around the Infected Place face costly restrictions that prevent them from operating normally until control measures have been completed.
- **The health and welfare of birds.**
- **Creates a potential risk of disease in other animals and humans.** Disease in domestic birds presents a direct risk to keepers of the infected birds and uncontrolled disease has an increased chance of mutating to present greater risk to humans and other animals.

Bath and North East Somerset Council has a role in implementing control measures that minimise the impact of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza on the public and businesses.

4. Wild birds

Avian influenza in wild birds is NOT a notifiable disease and as such is not part of the local authority / Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) disease control response detailed in paragraph 5 below.

However, Bath and North East Somerset Council do have a plan in place to respond to Avian Influenza in wild birds which includes increasing awareness of the disease in the area where the birds have been found, taking steps to ensure contact between wild birds and humans is minimised and issuing public communications.

Collection and disposal arrangements are also in place for wild birds found on public land. It remains the duty of landowners to address wild-bird carcases on private land.

5. Local authority role and resources – Commercial premises

Local authorities[1] have a legal duty to enforce the rules put in place to control and eradicate Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. Notifiable animal disease outbreaks are also identified as high risk in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, which means local authorities are required to help coordinate the local multiagency response to an animal disease outbreak.

APHA[2] vets are responsible for controls on the infected premises and deal with a range of activities including culling birds. They will also monitor the health of other commercial poultry flocks in the controlled zones. Using APHA guidance on risk and priorities, **the focus of the local authority role during an outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is** –

- **Enforcement of controls** within the Prevention Zone and Surveillance Zone.
- Foot patrols / communication on the controlled zones to **ensure that kept birds are housed**.
- Foot patrols / communication to **build data on kept birds**.
- Promote **bio security**.
- Erecting **road signs and public information signs where relevant**.
- **Guidance** for local businesses and the public on the impact of controls.

[1] County councils, unitary authorities, London and metropolitan boroughs under the Animal Health Act 1981.
[2] Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) – Defra agency

These activities may require resource from Regulatory Officers from Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licensing with support from communication / IT / mapping / footpaths / administration / emergency planning services.

6. Public interest

Public health - Humans and other animals can be infected with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza through close contact with infected birds. The cases of this occurring are very rare and the risk to human health is normally negligible**.** UKHSA / Public Health Wales advise anyone at risk from exposure to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza or confirmed cases in humans.

Backyard flocks – The national housing requirement put in place as part of the seasonal control measures will apply to all birds kept outdoors, including backyard flocks. The local authority animal health function can provide guidance on national requirements and any additional controls required from confirmed cases of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza.

Footpaths – In all animal disease outbreaks the Government aim to ensure that all aspects of the economy can operate as normal. It is therefore extremely unlikely that there will be a wholesale closure of footpaths because of the impact on tourism. APHA will review the risk presented by any footpaths running through or adjacent to the Infected Premises.

Roads – The local authority may be required to erect road signs at the edge of controlled zones around the infected premises to advise those moving poultry that restrictions are in place. The location of these is based on disease risk and discussed with APHA. Signs will be removed as soon as restrictions have been lifted.

Bath & North East Somerset Councils response to this is being led by the Public Protection team with assistance from other teams including Public Health, Highways, Footpaths, and Communications.

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