Measures to Reduce the Risk of Introduction of Avian Influenza

The European Community has introduced safeguard measures restricting importation from third countries of all captive birds and importation of pet birds travelling with their owners. These measures have been adopted to reduce the risk of introduction and spread of avian influenza.

They suspend importation of captive birds, except those destined for certain approved institutions. [See Information Note](doc 52Kb)

For pet birds travelling with their owners from third countries they prescribe an upper limit to the number (5) of pet birds that can be imported and a requirement for health certification by an official veterinary officer in the country of despatch. [See Information Note](doc 47Kb)

Where permitted, the introduction of live birds on to the territory of the EU must be done at a designated point of entry for the purpose of carrying out veterinary and documentary checks. Only Dublin Airport and Shannon Airport are designated for this purpose.

Advice when handing dead wild birds

- It is, in the first instance, important to note that there have been no
confirmed cases of H5N1 in Ireland

- However, wild birds can carry several diseases that are infectious to people. Members of the public should **not** handle dead wild birds unless necessary to do so.

- If people feel it necessary to handle dead wild birds, they should follow the instructions set out below which, essentially, mean taking simple hygienic precautions:

  - preferably, wear disposable protective gloves (not latex) when handling the dead bird;
  - alternatively, use reusable rubber gloves that are capable of being cleaned and disinfected immediately after use;
  - place the dead bird in a suitable leak proof plastic bag and avoid contamination of the outside of the bag;
  - seal the bag and place it in a second plastic bag with which the dead bird should have no direct contact;
  - remove the disposable gloves by turning them inside out and place them in the second bag or in a separate bag that should then be sealed and disposed of;
  - if using reusable gloves, remove them by turning them inside out and placing them in a plastic bag that should then be sealed;
  - before disposing of the dead bird, the outside of the second plastic should be washed with soap and water or disinfectant;
  - reusable rubber gloves should be thoroughly washed, using soap and water, and disinfected (using an approved disinfectant) before being reused.

- in all cases, hands, nails and forearms should be thoroughly washed with soap and water after the dead bird has been handled and bagged for disposal and **under no circumstances** should food be handled until this has been done.

**DAF and DARD meet to discuss Avian Influenza**

Senior officials, included veterinary and scientific experts, from the Department of Agriculture & Food in Dublin and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (Northern Ireland) met today (21 September) to discuss their respective approaches to the threat of avian influenza.

The meeting focused in particular on the measures both Departments have been putting in place to increase their respective levels of wild bird surveillance. The meeting also had the benefit of ornithological advice from wildlife experts in relation to wild bird migration paths from northern Europe to Ireland.

Both Departments concur with the current view that the risk of high pathogenic avian influenza being imported onto the island is probably 'low or remote'. Nonetheless, both Departments are committed to implementing the EU Commission decision to step up surveillance and have been taking steps to increase surveillance levels.

Given the economic importance of the poultry industry (particularly in Border counties) and the need to protect poultry farmers North and South, and the population at large, and specifically with a view to ensuring that any outbreak on the island of Ireland is rapidly identified and eradicated, the two Departments agreed to continue to work together over the coming months and to exchange the results of their respective wild bird surveillance programmes.

The two Departments will maintain close informal contacts and will review the position at the next scheduled meeting of the North / South Joint Working Group on 'Other Diseases' which meets under the auspices of the North / South Ministerial Council.

21 September, 2005

**Information and Advice on Avian Influenza in Wild Birds**

*This advice may be subject to change. Please consult the Department Agriculture and Food's website for up-to-date information, at the following address:*

1. Introduction

Wild birds, particularly water birds, are known to act as reservoirs for avian influenza viruses. Ducks and geese have been shown to be infected with influenza viruses, but rarely show evidence of disease. They are a means of transmission of avian influenza to domestic poultry - mainly through direct contact or through contaminated water supplies.

Normally the avian influenza viruses involved are low pathogenic strains that cause little or no disease in poultry. However, certain subtypes of the virus have the potential to mutate into highly pathogenic strains with serious consequences for domestic poultry flocks where they occur.

2. Public health risk associated with avian influenza

To date there has been no evidence of infection in humans associated with contact with wild birds.

Very rarely, highly pathogenic strains may cause disease in humans, and occasionally deaths. These cases have always been associated with close contact with infected poultry.

3. Current situation in relation to H5N1 virus

A highly pathogenic strain of H5N1 virus is currently circulating in Asia and Europe. The virus has been confirmed in wild birds, and it is now thought that these may play a role in the spread of the disease.

Many species of wild birds migrate to Ireland. Those species that may migrate from the infected areas of Russia, Mongolia, China, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Romania include those listed in Annex 1.

Migration studies indicate that only a small proportion of the populations of these species that breed in the known infected areas migrate to western Europe and Ireland. They present a theoretical risk of introduction of the H5N1 virus into Ireland. However this risk is currently perceived to be low due to the low numbers of migrants.


The Department of the Environment, Agriculture and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in the UK also maintains a comprehensive and up-to-date website with particular reference to the European situation at: http://www.defra.gov.uk.

4. Hunting

The Department is not recommending any restrictions on hunting activities at the moment, providing normal hygiene procedures for handling birds are followed as set out below. However this situation is being kept under review.

5. Import of wild bird carcases

The import of carcases of wild game birds from countries outside the EU is prohibited. The import of such carcases from unaffected EU Member States is not prohibited, but is strongly discouraged at this time.

6. Policy on culling wild birds in the event of an outbreak of avian influenza

In the event of an outbreak of avian influenza, the policy of this Department will be that wild birds will not be culled, as this is likely to lead to dispersal of the disease. This policy is in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organisation and Food and Agriculture Organisation.

7. Active Surveillance

Ireland has carried out surveillance for avian influenza in poultry since 1995. Since 2002, additional surveillance in poultry and wild birds has been carried out as part of a European Union survey.

All poultry samples to date have been negative. In common with a number of other EU Member States, a number of low pathogenic strains of AI were detected in Wigeon and Mallard ducks during the surveys. None of these were of the subtypes of concern for animal or public health (i.e. H5 or H7).

8. Passive Surveillance

The Department of Agriculture and Food has put in place arrangements for the early warning of increased or unusual patterns of deaths in wild birds with the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, BirdWatch Ireland, and National Association of Regional Game Councils. This allows for the most efficient and best-targeted approach to surveillance in wild birds.

Members of the public or other interested groups may also notice and report instances of deaths of wild birds, particularly given the recent media focus on the risks posed to the human population from avian influenza.

It is not unusual to observe an occasional dead or sick bird in the wild, and this is not a cause for concern.
However, if a number of dead birds are seen in one place, the Local District Veterinary Office of the Department of Agriculture should be contacted. Veterinary officials will determine whether the numbers and species involved are of interest for the purposes of the avian influenza survey, in consultation with a member of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and will arrange for sampling of the birds if this is appropriate.

9. Handling of wild birds

The best advice is not to handle live or dead wild birds unnecessarily. There are a number of diseases carried by birds that people can contract (e.g. salmonella and chlamydia).

If contact with wild birds has been made, then normal hygiene precautions should be taken i.e. disinfect* your hands. If disinfectant is not available, make sure to scrub your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water.

10. Safe disposal of dead birds

Dead birds may be safely disposed of by deep burial (i.e. by being buried several feet deep in a place that will not be disturbed).

*Avian influenza (fowl plague) is susceptible to a range of disinfectants. The up-to-date list of approved disinfectants may be found on the Department's website at the following address:
http://www.agriculture.gov.ie:8030/animal_health/avian_influenza/poultry_industry/AI_apprvd_disinfectants.doc*

ANNEX 1

Provisional list of wild bird species identified by the European Commission as presenting higher risk in relation to avian influenza (Latin and English names)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin name</th>
<th>English name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Anser albirolena</td>
<td>Russian White-fronted Goose*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Anser fabalis</td>
<td>Bean Goose*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Anas platyrhynchos</td>
<td>Mallard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Anas strepera</td>
<td>Gadwall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Anas acuta</td>
<td>Northern Pintail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Anas clypeata</td>
<td>Northern Shoveler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Anas Penelope</td>
<td>Eurasian Wigeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Anas crecca</td>
<td>Common Teal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Anas querquedula</td>
<td>Garganay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Aythyra ferina</td>
<td>Common Pochard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Aythya fuligula</td>
<td>Tufted Duck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Vanellus vanellus</td>
<td>Northern Lapwing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Philomachus pugnax</td>
<td>Ruff'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Larus ribibundus</td>
<td>Black-headed Gull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Larus canus</td>
<td>Common Gull</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These species only occur irregularly and in small numbers in Ireland

1. As the situation is evolving rapidly, please consult the Department's web-site for an up-to-date list of affected countries

Avian influenza in wild birds

List of Wild Bird Species Presenting Higher Risk in Relation to Avian Influenza (doc 19Kb)

Information and Advice on Avian Influenza in Wild Birds