Ref: VITT 1200/HPAI-Germany
Date: 25 June 2007

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5N1) in Germany

Note: *Defra's International Animal Health Cote Team (IAHCT) monitors outbreaks of high impact diseases around the world. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is among those diseases of major concern.*

Disease report

On 22 June 2007, Germany reported the suspicion of avian influenza in swans in Nürnberg, Bayern region (Mittelfranken province) (see map) (European Commission, 2007a). This was confirmed as HPAI (H5N1) on 25 June 2007 (European Commission, 2007b). As of early afternoon on 25 June, seven notifications of HPAI in wild birds (swans and a goose) were reported by Germany in ADNS.

Situation assessment

In 2006, Germany reported a number of cases of H5N1 HPAI in wild birds in various locations in the country. The last case was reported in April 2006. As a response to these new findings, Germany has applied disease control measures following EU rules with established protection and surveillance zones.

Intra Community trade in live poultry and poultry meat is subject to EU animal health rules. TRACES electronic database does record the movement of live poultry and poultry hatching eggs because they require veterinary certification under EU rules. In general, data in TRACES is dependant on accurate entry at the point of origin and expedience in validation. TRACES does not record poultry meat and other poultry products intended for human consumption because these do not require official veterinary certification under EU rules.

TRACES electronic database indicated some 24 consignments of live poultry and two consignments of other birds (i.e. birds of prey and other birds) that have been imported from Germany since Mid April 2007.

The two reported outbreaks of H5N1 in commercial poultry in the EU (i.e. Hungary and the UK) in early 2007 appeared to be linked (see full epidemiological report at:
http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/pdf/epid_findings050407.pdf

The most recent case of H5N1 in the EU was reported in the Czech Republic (see map above and see
http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/monitoring/pdf/hpaih5n1czechrep210607.pdf

At this stage, it remains unknown how closely the viruses from Germany and the Czech Republic may be related and further tests are underway.

Food and Farming Group
International Animal Health Division
International Animal Disease Monitoring

Our risk assessments
http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/monitoring/pdf/hpaidevelopments110507.pdf
http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/monitoring/pdf/hpaieurope300606.pdf
have also considered a possibility that the virus may have been introduced in wild bird populations in a number of discrete pockets and maintained at a very low level, but remain unnoticed. On that basis we have concluded that sporadic outbreaks of H5N1 (or any other type of H5 or H7 HPAI) may continue to occur within a wider region worldwide including Europe (and the UK) leading to sporadic outbreaks in the summer of 2007 when birds congregate for moulting. Moulting waterfowl are unlikely to move longer distances.

While dead swans may be an 'indicator species' because they are easier to detect, this detection again highlights the importance of surveillance for dead birds and how essential it is to continue to maintain high biosecurity standards with regard to domestic poultry.

Conclusion

On the basis of this report and the previous risk assessments we consider that recent epidemiological developments, both in Europe and worldwide do not significantly alter our previous overall conclusion that there is an increased but still low likelihood that the virus may be introduced from the currently affected areas to the UK.

Should H5N1 virus, or any other type of H5 or H7 HPAI, be detected in wild birds in the affected area, it is unlikely that it may be introduced to the UK by direct movements at this time of the year. However, this risk will be reviewed should the virus be detected in wild birds in areas within the major migratory flyway that may involve direct movements to the UK in the near future.

Based on the disease report and situation assessment, the likelihood of the introduction of the virus from Germany to the UK via legal importation of live poultry is considered negligible at this stage. However, this likelihood may be reviewed should any consignments be identified by the German authorities to have originated from the currently affected area.

At this stage, the likelihood of the introduction of the virus via legal trade in poultry meat from the area currently under restriction cannot be determined. In any case, EU rules require an affected Member State to inform other EU MS of any relevant consignment that may have originated from the area that is currently placed under restrictions. Nevertheless, it is important to continue to maintain and implement appropriate biosecurity measures.

On the basis of this outbreak and previous experiences, further developments may be likely and we continue to monitor and review the situation.

References

European Commission. (2007a). Suspicion of Avian Influenza in swans in Germany. Urgent Fax 707 22/06/2007. Directorate D – Animal Health and Welfare, Brussels, D1 (07) D/411463.

European Commission. (2007b). 1) Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 confirmed in wild birds in Germany; 2) Legislation in relation poultry outbreaks and wild bird cases of H5N1 HPAI, biosecurity and surveillance in the EU. Urgent Fax 708 25/06/2007. Directorate D – Animal Health and Welfare, Brussels, D1 (07) D/411466.