

25 June 2017

Outbreak Response Unit, Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response
Centre for Respiratory Diseases and Meningitis
National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD)
24-hour hotline number: 082-883-9920

Influenza A(H5N8) reported from Mpumalanga Province, June 2017

The NICD has received notification that influenza A(H5N8) has been detected in poultry farms in Mpumalanga Province. Influenza A(H5N8) is classified as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). It emerged in 2010 in China and caused widespread poultry outbreaks across Europe, East Asia and North America in 2014/15. Influenza A(H5N8) was first confirmed in wild and domestic birds on the African continent in November 2016 in Tunisia, Egypt and Nigeria followed by poultry outbreaks reported in Niger, Uganda, and Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 17 May 2017 an outbreak of HPAI H5N8 was confirmed in Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe on a commercial poultry farm.

Although the risk of transmission of influenza A(H5N8) to humans is extremely low, personal protective equipment including gloves, disposable aprons/clothing and masks capable of preventing inhalation of aerosolised virus particles, should be used by all persons in contact with live or dead infected poultry. Handwashing with disinfectant soap after contact with birds is essential. Any persons with known or suspected close contact with dead or ill birds that have confirmed A(H5N8) infection and who present with upper or lower respiratory tract symptoms (cough, runny nose, scratchy throat, or pneumonia) and/or conjunctivitis should be investigated. Clusters of three or more cases of severe respiratory illness (hospitalisation or death) which are epidemiologically linked should also be investigated even if there is no documented bird exposure.

Clinicians who suspect infection in their patients should contact the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) doctor on call (**Hotline number 0828839920**) to discuss the case. A naso-and/or oropharyngeal swab/s (a flocked swabs with a plastic shaft) should be collected from the patient, placed in viral or universal transport media, and submitted on ice to (NICD) for testing.

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) is providing veterinary support including diagnostics, surveillance and control measures. Farmers who suspect infection in their poultry should notify the local State Vet office or Extension officer who will visit the farm, investigate the incident and collect samples from the birds to rule out the disease.