

b Avian influenza in South Africa: no human cases identified

The outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza A (H5N8) in poultry is ongoing after its emergence in South Africa in June 2017. According to an update report issued by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries on 25 August 2017, 24 localized outbreaks have been identified to date as follows: ten outbreaks in commercial chickens, three outbreaks in commercial ostrich, five outbreaks in wild birds, three outbreaks amongst birds kept as a hobby, and three outbreaks in backyard poultry. Outbreaks have been reported to the OIE, and reports may be found at <http://www.oie.int>.

While on a global level, H5N8 has not been documented to cause human infection, it is appropriate that all exposed workers with symptoms of influenza-like illness are tested for possible avian influenza infection. Therefore, following the first reported avian influenza A(H5N8) outbreaks in poultry in South Africa, human surveillance to detect possible human infections has been initiated by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) in persons exposed to the virus on affected farms.

The NICD is using the following case definition to guide laboratory testing of exposed persons. A suspected case of A(H5N8) is defined as:

- the presence of cough, fever, sore throat, runny nose, difficulty breathing or conjunctivitis;
- AND
- documented exposure (direct contact or proximity of <15 meters) to infected birds (alive or dead) OR having had worked in a poultry house with infected birds, in the 10 days preceding the onset of symptoms.

To date, workers at 3 affected poultry farms in Mpumalanga and Gauteng provinces have been screened for A(H5N8) according to the case definition above and plans are in place for screening at poultry and ostrich farms in the Western Cape Province. Exposed persons from the first two affected farms in Mpumalanga (n=35) and the first affected farm in Gauteng (n=25) all tested negative for influenza A (includes avian influenza). Two additional samples received by the NICD in July from persons meeting the case definition tested positive for seasonal human influenza A and negative for avian influenza A viruses.

The continued cooperation of the public and the poultry industry including timeous reporting of dead and dying birds to veterinary services is essential to facilitate disease control efforts. It is important that persons working with infected poultry, their excrement or their products should use appropriate personal protective clothing and adhere to disinfection procedures. Exposed workers meeting the case definition provided above should have samples collected to test for avian influenza. If testing is required, please contact the NICD doctor on call to discuss the case (082 883 9920).

Poultry and poultry products that are available for sale in retail outlets are safe for human consumption. There is no danger of transmission of avian influenza from chicken or egg products to humans.

Source: Centre for Respiratory Diseases and Meningitis, NICD-NHLS; (cheryl@nicd.ac.za)

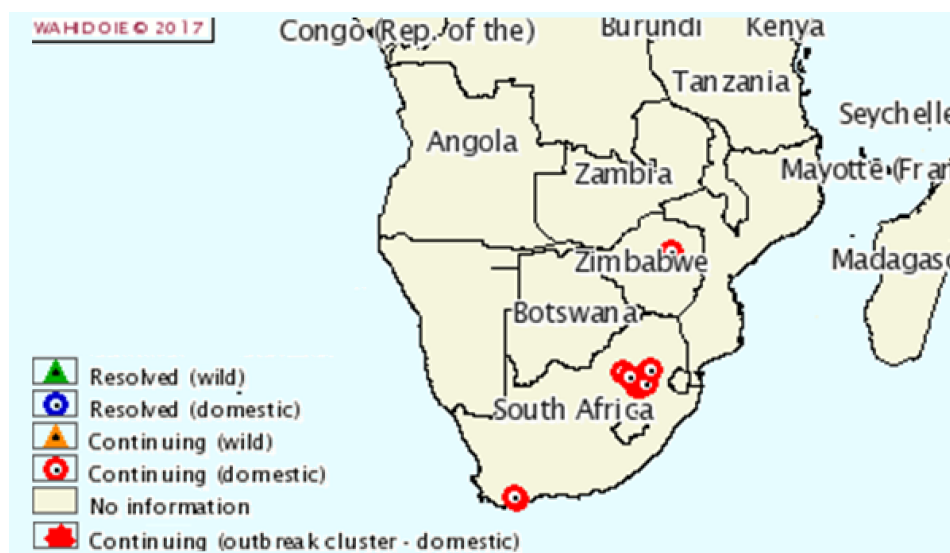


Figure 5. OIE summary report of South African HPAI outbreak in domestic poultry as accessed on 14 Aug 2017, period 1 May 2017 to 16 August 2017. (http://www.oie.int/wahis_2/public/wahid.php/Reviewreport/Review/viewsummary?reportid=24127; accessed 16/08/2017)