



## **ALERT::: Europe at risk from H5N8 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)**

### **CONTEXT**

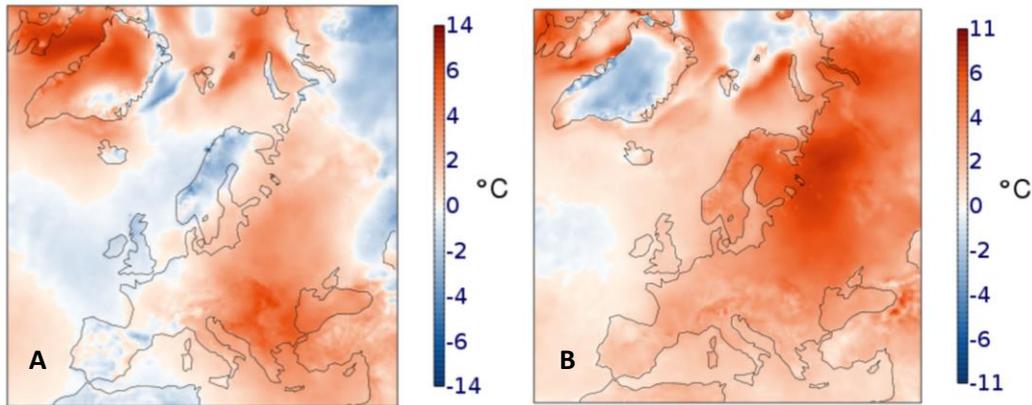
Eastern Europe is currently experiencing an upsurge of H5N8 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) with over 10 outbreaks reported in four countries this year: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. The first outbreak was observed in Poland on 30 December 2019 and involved turkeys. Overall, affected species mainly include chickens, ducks, geese, Guinea fowl and turkeys. An infected wild hawk was found dead near Lubelskie, Poland, where poultry farms were experiencing outbreaks. No human cases caused by viruses of this subtype have been reported to date.

The epidemiological information and pattern of these recent H5N8 HPAI outbreaks suggests a likely role for wild birds in the dissemination of the virus across parts of Eastern Europe. Investigation of the Slovakia outbreak, which occurred in a backyard flock with no links to commercial poultry farms, strongly supports this hypothesis. Eastern Europe experienced unusual mild temperatures during the months of November and December 2019 (see Figure 1 below), with limited snow coverage. Consequently, wild birds in Europe may not have pursued their usual patterns of southwards movement, crossing the Mediterranean Basin.

European countries located at lower latitudes and short distances from the current outbreaks and with significant poultry production may be at higher risk for disease introduction over the coming months, depending on wild bird movements. In addition, poultry trade remains a major risk factor for disease spread amongst countries. Current regulatory frameworks in Europe with regards to poultry flock testing and poultry movement controls at country borders should be strictly enforced to mitigate this risk.

Genetic information on these H5N8 HPAI viruses is not yet publicly available. Information shared with FAO by the FAO/EU Reference Laboratory Avian Influenza in Padova, Italy (Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie - IZSVE) indicates the current European viruses have close genetic identity (99.8-100% genetic similarity) and are related to clade 2.3.4.4b H5N8 viruses detected in Africa in 2018-19. Further investigations are continuing.

**Figure 1.** Surface air temperature anomalies in Europe for November 2019 (map A) and December 2019 (map B) relative to the average temperature over the period 1981-2010. Sources: Climate Change Service – Copernicus Programme [[reference](#)].



#### FAO ADVISES COUNTRIES AT RISK TO:

- Increase surveillance efforts in poultry and dead/hunted wild birds
- Limit direct and indirect contact between domestic poultry and wild birds
- Provide mechanisms for reporting sick or dead birds (hotlines, collection points)
- Raise awareness among livestock keepers, the general population, marketers and hunters about HPAI, precautionary measures as well as reporting mechanisms for sick or dead birds
- Initiate/reactivate the compensation policy and allocate financial resources; Ensure compensation for poultry culled as part of control measures during an HPAI outbreak is provided in a timely manner, see GEMP pp. 18-19: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ba0137e.pdf>

Taking action against wild birds, particularly indiscriminate hunting or destruction of habitat, is not recommended!

#### FAO'S ROLE IS TO:

- Monitor and assess the evolving disease situation. To share updates on your country situation, please do not hesitate to contact FAO at [FAO-GLEWS@fao.org](mailto:FAO-GLEWS@fao.org)
- Liaise with FAO Reference Centres and partner organizations to assess virus characteristics and provide laboratory protocols for detection
- Raise awareness about important epidemiologically or virologically findings and their implications
- Provide recommendations for affected countries and those at risk addressing preparedness and disease control
- Offer support in provision of diagnostic reagents and personal protective equipment, provided certain conditions are met (contact: [EMPRES-Lab-Unit@fao.org](mailto:EMPRES-Lab-Unit@fao.org))
- Offer assistance to national authorities for shipment of samples as well as virus sub-typing and sequencing (contact: [EMPRES-Shipping-Service@fao.org](mailto:EMPRES-Shipping-Service@fao.org))

To contact FAO for further information or support please write to [EMPRES-animal-health@fao.org](mailto:EMPRES-animal-health@fao.org)

## IMPORTANT LINKS

- [Global Avian Influenza Virus with Zoonotic Potential situation update](#) – new update including H5N8 HPAI virus
- [H5N8 HPAI Global Disease Situation Update](#) – last release on 23 October 2019
- [IZSve – Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Europe: update](#)
- DEFRA Update Situation Assessment - Highly pathogenic avian influenza in Europe. [Assessment number 7, 7 January 2020](#); [Assessment number 8, 14 January 2020](#).
- [EFSA Avian influenza overview August – November 2019](#)
- [WHO Vaccine Composition Meeting Report, September 2019](#)
- [FAO Focus on: Highly pathogenic H5 avian influenza in 2016 and 2017 – observations and future perspectives](#)
- [EMPRES Watch: H5N8 highly pathogenic avian influenza \(HPAI\) of clade 2.3.4.4 detected through surveillance of wild migratory birds in the Tyva Republic, the Russian Federation – potential for international spread](#)
- [FAO Animal Health Manual: Good Emergency Management Practice: The Essentials](#)
- [FAO Animal Health Manual: Biosecurity for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza](#)
- [FAO Animal Health Manual: Preparing for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza](#)
- [FAO Animal Health Manual: Wild Birds and Avian Influenza](#)
- [FAO's Avian Influenza webpage](#)
- [OIE Avian Influenza page](#)
- [WHO Avian Influenza page](#)