BIOSECURITY ALERT

WHAT IS AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Avian Influenza (AI) is a highly contagious viral disease that affects both domestic and wild birds. This virus can also infect mammalian species including humans thus this can be classified as a zoonotic disease; which means that it can infect both humans and animals. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is the most fatal type AI. It is caused by highly contagious viruses which are grouped into 3 types and classified further into subtypes. Fortunately, this virus has not been reported and is not present in Fiji.

UPDATE FROM THE WORLD ORGNAISATION FOR ANIMAL HEALTH

HPAI outbreaks have been reported in Africa, America, Europe and Asia. However, recently the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) received notification of an outbreak of HPAI (serotype H7N7), in Lethbridge Victoria, Australia. The report was received on 31 July 2020. This occurred in a free range premise that contained 2 separate sheds of birds - all birds in one shed were affected with HPAI and all birds in the second shed were clinically unaffected. There were a total of 1,669 dead birds out of 43,500 susceptible stock.

On 12 August, 2020 another notification was received regarding an outbreak of Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI), serotype H5N2 in Bairnsdale and Lethbridge which are two different localities within Victoria, Australia. These instances were reported to OIE on 07 August 2020 by Australia. The LPAI was found in a turkey and spent layer hen farm within the existing restricted area of HPAI.

WHICH ANIMALS CAN GET AI?

AI affects both domestic (chicken, turkeys, quails, guinea fowl, etc) and wild birds. AI viruses have also been isolated, although less frequently, from mammalian species, including rats, mice, weasels, ferrets, pigs, cats, tigers, dogs and horses, as well as from humans.

SOME SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF INFECTED ANIMALS

Mild Forms; ruffled feathers, reduced egg production, or mild effects on respiratory system.
Severe Forms; respiratory signs such as coughing, sneezing. Other signs include;
– quietness and extreme depression;
– sudden drop in production of eggs,
– swelling of the skin under the eyes;
–signs of nervousness;
– diarrhoea;
– haemorrhages on the hock;
– sudden deaths - a few deaths may occur over several days, followed by rapid spread and accelerated mortality rate that can then reach 100% within 48 hours
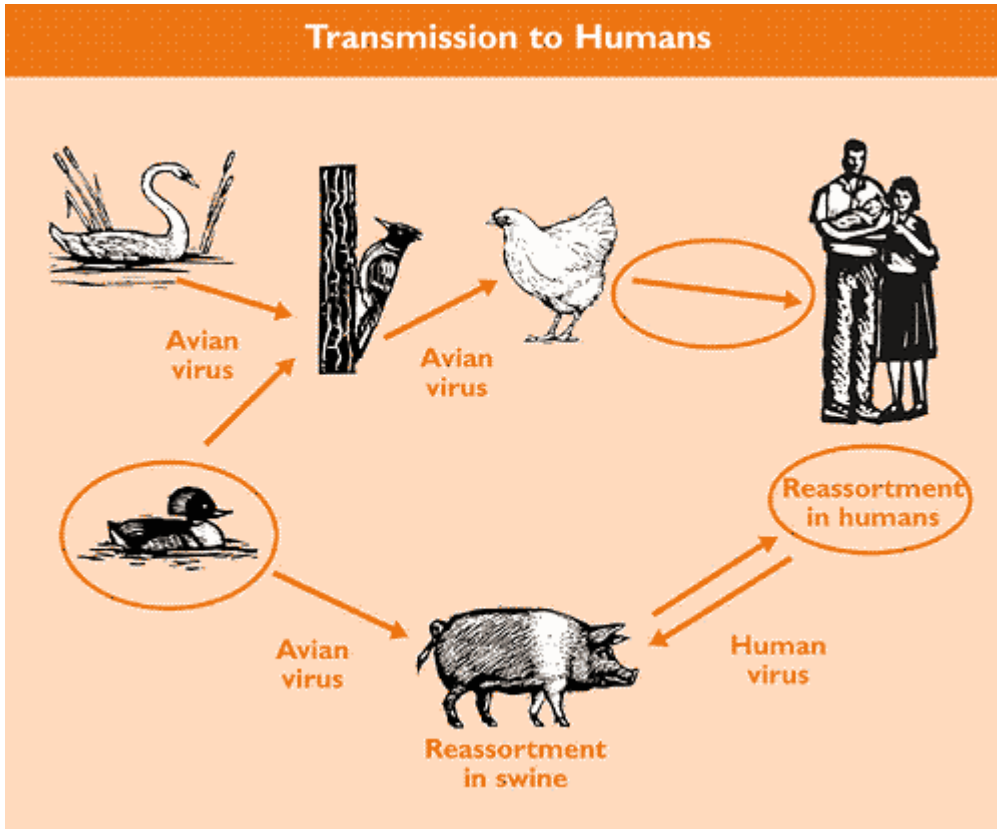
wattles and combs become swollen and congested

It is important to understand that some infected animals may show no signs of illness at all. Wild birds can normally carry AI viruses in their respiratory or intestinal tracts but they do not get sick which allows them to carry the viruses on long distances along their migration flyways.

Source: https://thepoultrysite.com/articles/avian-influenza-in-poultry

HOW CAN ANIMALS GET AVIAN INFLUENZA?

There are several factors that can contribute to the spread of AI viruses such as, globalization and international trade, farming and sale (live bird markets), wild birds and migratory routes. AI viruses are also shed in faeces and respiratory secretions, spread via direct contact, contaminated feed and water, contaminated farm equipment and easily spread from farm to farm.

Transmission to Humans

Source: https://www.learn-about-birds.com/bird-flu-global-outbreak-global-concern/

HOW CAN HUMANS GET AVIAN INFLUENZA?

The infection route is through close contact with infected birds. No evidence has been provided to suggest that the consumption of poultry or egg could transmit AI virus to humans. However, as precautionary and regulatory measure, animals that are culled to control AI outbreak, should not be allowed to enter human food and animal feed chain and precautionary measures for the cleaning and cooking process should be respected.

Picture credit: https://www.oie.int/en/animal-health-in-the-world/web-portal-on-avian-influenza/about-ai/

How Infected Backyard Poultry Could Spread Bird Flu to People

Human Infections with Bird Flu Viruses Rare But Possible

Source: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/avian-in-humans.htm
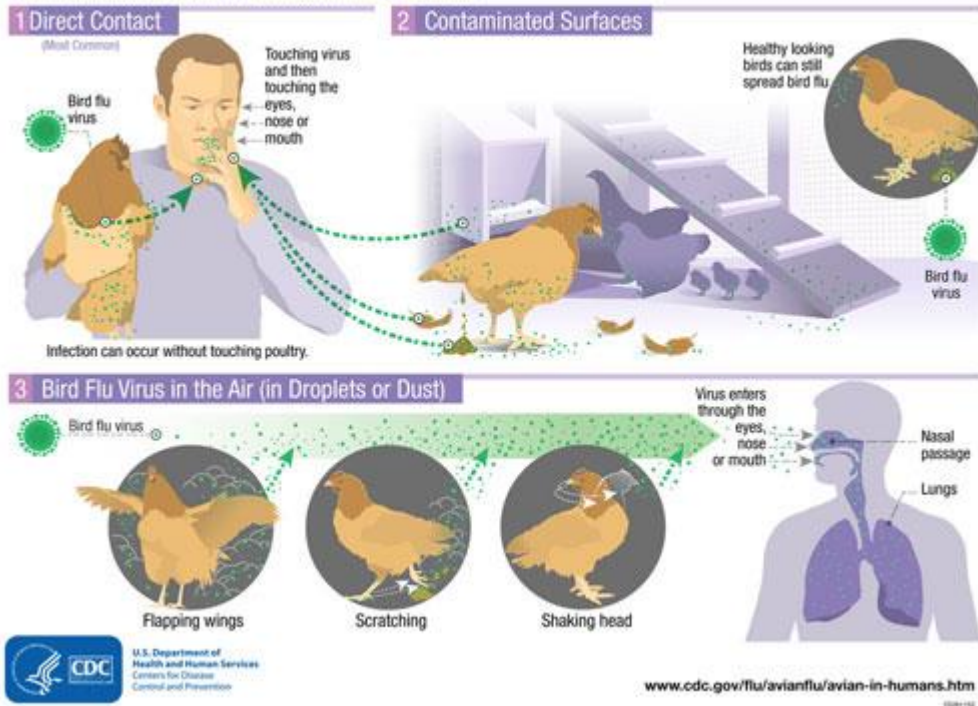
PREVENTION AND CONTROL

AI is a notifiable disease listed by the OIE. Fiji is a member of OIE and therefore; all HPAI, irrespective of strains, detected in birds and Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) subtypes H5 and H7 detected in birds must be reported to OIE.

The Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) does not allow the importation of frozen poultry meat, fertile eggs, and day-old chicks from any other countries except New Zealand to ensure safety of the livestock industry in Fiji.

The first line of defense is early detection of the disease outbreak followed by rapid response. This also requires heightened awareness among veterinarian and animal owners coupled with similar efforts placed on preparing for potential outbreak control.

Strict biosecurity measures and good hygiene are essential in preventing the disease outbreak. Hence the following should be considered;

- keep poultry away from areas frequented by wild fowl,
- do not keep on the premises elements that may attract wild birds, including poultry feed products placed outside the building;
- maintain strict control over access to flocks by vehicles, people and equipment;
- ensure proper sanitation of property, poultry houses and equipment;
- avoid the introduction of birds with unknown disease status into the flock;
- report any bird illnesses and sudden deaths to BAF.;
- ensure appropriate disposal of manure, litter and dead poultry; and
- prevent mix live bird markets.

Vaccination strategies can be effective as an emergency measure in an outbreak or as a routine measure in an endemic area.

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT, IF I SUSPECT AI?

Considering the large economic impact of HPAI, the public is requested to contact BAF prior to the import of any poultry products into Fiji. If you suspect any signs and symptoms of AI, contact your veterinarian immediately or BAF team on short code 5997 or phone 3312512 or email on info@baf.com.fj

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