

Brussels, 23 January 2007

Avian Influenza: Highly pathogenic H5 virus confirmed in Hungary

The European Commission has been informed by the Hungarian authorities today of an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in Csongrød County, south-east Hungary. The virus was suspected when an abnormally high mortality rate was reported in a flock of over 3,000 geese. Diagnostic tests carried out by Hungary's national laboratory confirmed the virus to be the highly pathogenic H5 strain, and samples will now be sent to the Community Reference Laboratory for avian influenza in Weybridge to determine if it is the H5N1 virus.

Upon suspicion of the disease, the Hungarian authorities have already culled the infected flock, in order to prevent the spread of the virus. They are also applying the measures laid down in the Avian Influenza Directive and Decision 2006/415/EC on avian influenza in domestic poultry (see IP/06/180). This entails the establishment of a protection zone of 3 km radius and a surveillance zone of 10 km around the infected holding, where poultry must be kept indoors, movement of poultry is banned except directly to the slaughterhouse, and the dispatch of meat outside the zone is forbidden except where products have undergone the controls provided for under EU legislation. The area covered by the protection zone and the surveillance zone is classified as a high risk area (area A) which is surrounded by a low risk area (area B) acting as a buffer zone to the disease free parts of the country. Strict movement controls are in place, there is a prohibition on gatherings of poultry and other birds and on-farm biosecurity measures will be strengthened.

This is the first incidence of highly pathogenic avian influenza in the EU since August 2006, when one case occurred in Dresden zoo in Germany. As part of the precautionary measures against the disease, all Member States continue to apply strong biosecurity measures to minimise the risk as much as possible. Heightened surveillance is in place throughout the EU, to identify and eradicate the H5N1 virus as quickly as possible if it occurs.

The disease situation will be reviewed at a meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health that will take place on Friday 26 January. The Committee will assess the zones set up by the Hungarian authorities, with a view to endorsing them and including them in the Annex of the Avian Influenza Decision.

For more information, see:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/dyna/influenza/index.cfm