

DISCLAIMER

The OIE, after performing an administrative and technical screening of a self-declaration concerning the disease-free status of a country, a zone or a compartment ("self-declaration"), as described in the standard operating procedures for self-declarations, reserves the right to publish or not the self-declaration on its website. There shall be no right of appeal from this decision nor any recourse of any kind.

The publication by the OIE of a self-declaration on its website does not reflect the official opinion of the OIE.

Responsibility for the information contained in a self-declaration lies entirely with the OIE Delegate of the Member concerned.

Neither the OIE nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for:

- (i) any errors, inaccuracies or omissions in the content of a self-declaration,
- (ii) the use which may be made of the information contained in a self-declaration;
- (iii) any direct or indirect consequences of any nature arising from or relating to the use of the information contained in a self-declaration.

Self-declaration for the recovery of country freedom from Avian Influenza in poultry in Ireland

Declaration sent to the OIE on 16 March 2021 by Dr Martin Blake, OIE Delegate for Ireland, Chief Veterinary Officer, Veterinary Services, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

1. Introduction

An outbreak of avian influenza subtype H5N8 was confirmed in a small backyard turkey flock on 10th December 2020 in Ireland. This outbreak represented the first occurrence of the disease in poultry in Ireland since 2012 when low pathogenic H5N2 was detected in a non-commercial pheasant flock. The last outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in poultry in Ireland occurred in 1983.

Ireland has remained free of avian influenza as defined in Article 10.4.1 of Chapter 10.4 Infection with Avian influenza viruses since the single outbreak was confirmed on 10th December 2020.

The objective of this declaration is to regain disease freedom status from avian influenza for the entire territory of Ireland from 15th March 2021 in accordance with Article 10.4.3 of Chapter 10.4 Infection with Avian influenza viruses and Chapter 1.6 Procedures for self - declaration and for official recognition by the OIE of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)*.

Ireland formally requests the OIE to publish this self-declaration for the recovery of country freedom from avian influenza. A statement of responsibility for this self-declaration is contained in Annex I.

2. Avian influenza outbreak control measures

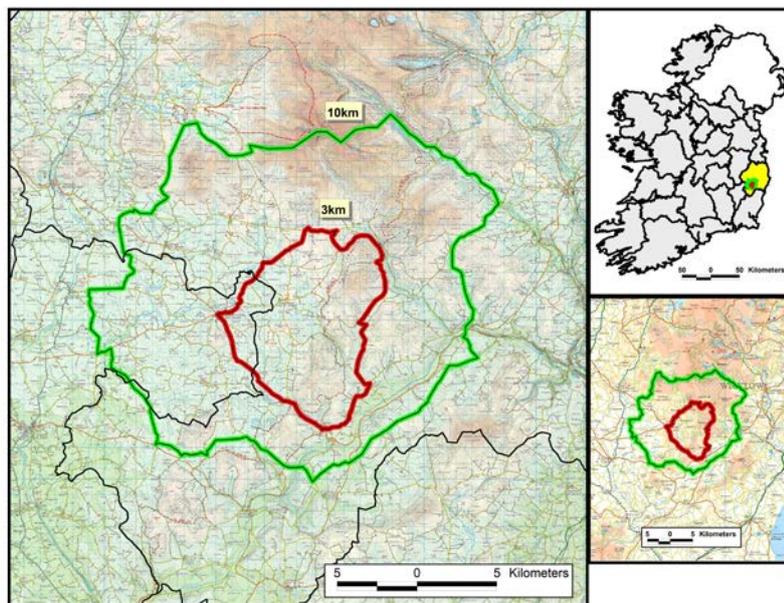
Avian Influenza in poultry is a notifiable disease in Ireland (reference below) and a stamping out policy is implemented. Vaccination for avian influenza is not permitted for poultry in Ireland. It is however permitted in zoo birds on a voluntary basis, and it is done in compliance with [Commission Decision 2007/598/EC](#).

On 9th December 2020 the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) was notified of suspected clinical signs of avian influenza in a small number of birds from small backyard flock comprising 127 turkeys which were presented for slaughter at a nearby small slaughter plant. No other birds had been presented for slaughter at the plant that day. Both the slaughter plant and holding of origin were restricted immediately pending results. Samples were taken immediately and sent to the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory, which is the National Reference Laboratory for Avian influenza in Ireland for testing. All birds were killed, and the carcasses disposed of in a manner to prevent the spread of disease. On 10th December, brain tissue samples tested positive for the presence of H5N8 subtype. Pathogenicity and virus isolation testing was attempted numerous times but was unsuccessful due to low levels of viral genetic material found in affected birds. An immediate notification was submitted to the OIE on 11th December 2020.

An epidemiological investigation was carried out on the infected holding. There had been no movements of poultry or poultry products on or off the holding in the 30 days prior to the movement of the entire flock to the slaughter plant on 9th December. The epidemiological investigation concluded that the most probable source of infection in the turkeys were infected wild birds. The H5N8 avian influenza subtype had previously detected in wild birds in Ireland around this time. Cleansing and disinfection were carried out at slaughter plant on the 11th December 2020 and on the infected holding on 15th December 2020.

The Restriction zones comprising a 3km Protection zone and a 10km Surveillance Zone were established on 10th December 2020 (see figure 1. below). A total of 48 flocks were identified within the 10 km restriction zone surrounding the infected holding of which 11 backyard flocks were located in the Protection zone. 35 backyard flocks and 2 commercial flocks (>150 birds) were located in the Surveillance zone All 11 flocks within the 3km zone were examined by Official Veterinarians of DAFM within 48 hours of the confirmed outbreak and visits were conducted to all flocks within the 10km zone within 72 hours. Measures introduced in the restriction zones included for example, a ban on the movement of poultry or other captive birds, eggs, poultry meat, carcasses, poultry litter or poultry manure, except in accordance with a licence issued by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM); a requirement to clean and disinfect all equipment and vehicles that that were likely to have been in contact with poultry or other captive birds and a ban on the release of game birds.

Figure 1: Avian influenza restriction zones



Epidemiological investigations of the infected holding identified 4 contact flocks due to human movements which were all located within the 10 km zone. All 4 backyard holdings were officially restricted and follow up visits and surveillance were carried out prior to lifting of restrictions.

Two high-risk flocks were depopulated as a precautionary measure. Preventative culling of a broiler flock (~22,000 birds) was carried out due to their close proximity to the slaughterhouse to which the avian influenza H5N8 positive turkey flock presented for slaughter. No clinical signs were observed in these birds, and all subsequent testing of samples (oropharyngeal swabs, cloacal swabs, blood and tissue samples) returned negative results for avian influenza.

A second high risk flock was identified from surveillance (oropharyngeal swabs, cloacal swabs, blood samples) carried out within the 10km surveillance zone on a game bird rearing holding (~9,500 birds) which revealed evidence of previous exposure to Avian influenza in an otherwise healthy flock. Although a low viral load in samples prevented the identification of the avian influenza subtype in this case, the flock was culled as a precaution.

As there were no further outbreaks of avian influenza detected in the restriction zone, the measures were lifted on 14th January 2021.

3. National Biosecurity Measures and Awareness Programme

Both European Union (EU) legislation and national legislation are enforced in addition to strategies for effective risk management, risk communication to stakeholders, and enhanced on-farm biosecurity to safeguard the Irish poultry industry from the risk posed by notifiable avian influenza. Imports of poultry and poultry products into Ireland are carried out in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 10.4 Infection with Avian influenza Viruses of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)*. All imports of poultry, poultry products and hatching eggs are subject to veterinary certification in accordance with the provisions of EU Council Directive 2009/158/EC, and Commission Regulation (EC) No 798/2008.

The control measures for avian influenza are laid down in European Community legislation (in particular Council Directive 2005/94/EC, Commission Decisions 2018/1136, 2006/563 and 2005/734) and in national legislation including [Statutory Instrument No. 701/2006 - European Communities \(Control of Avian Influenza\) Regulations](#). The registration of all poultry holdings in Ireland with DAFM is a national legislative requirement in accordance with [Statutory Instrument No. 114/2014 - Control on places where poultry are kept Regulations 2014](#). The requirement to register applies to all poultry premises, from large commercial poultry holdings to premises with only 1 or 2 birds such as hobby or “backyard” poultry flocks. [Statutory Instrument No. 130 of 2016 \(Notification and Control of Diseases affecting Terrestrial Animals \(No. 2\) Regulations 2016\)](#) categorises Avian influenza as a high priority notifiable disease. This means that any person who suspects the presence of the disease is legally obliged to report it to DAFM without delay. DAFM operates a 24/7 on-call rota involving veterinary staff for the notification and investigation of all suspect former OIE List A diseases including avian influenza.

In light of the increased risk of an avian influenza outbreak in Ireland due to the detection of HPAI H5N8 in wild birds last November additional national legislation was introduced to help mitigate the risk.

On 1st December 2020, DAFM introduced [Avian Influenza \(Biosecurity measures\) Regulations 2020](#) for poultry and captive bird owners and [Avian Influenza \(Restriction on Assembly of Live Birds\) Regulations 2020](#) which introduced a ban on bird gatherings for fairs, shows, and sales. The biosecurity regulations require all poultry owners to implement additional biosecurity measures on their holdings including for example, restricting access to poultry to essential visitors, establishing disinfection points and storing feed and bedding in a manner to prevent wild bird access. A [guidance document](#) for poultry owners regarding the implementation of these measures was published on the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine’s website.

In addition a housing order was introduced on 21st December 2020 the [Avian Influenza \(Precautionary Confinement of Birds\) Regulations 2020](#) requiring all poultry and other captive birds to be housed or confined in a manner which prevents access by wild birds. An [explanatory guide](#) was published in addition to regular disease updates and biosecurity advice on the [Gov.ie website](#).

In addition to the legislative powers which DAFM can use to mitigate the risk, DAFM also issues regular disease updates and biosecurity advice and information to the poultry industry.

DAFM has implemented a comprehensive biosecurity awareness programme for avian influenza which involved the publication of regular disease updates to a wide range of stakeholders which can be accessed on the dedicated [Avian influenza \(Bird Flu\)- Current Situation](#) page of the Gov.ie website. During high-risk periods in particular, DAFM also hold regular meetings with stakeholders including free range producers to heighten awareness of the importance of biosecurity. Avian influenza clinical signs factsheet and tailored biosecurity leaflets have been produced for different categories of production including for example backyard flocks, turkey flocks etc. which can be viewed on the [Poultry](#) page of the Gov.ie website. DAFM also operates a text alert service to communicate quickly with registered flock owners during a high-risk period. Online social media platforms and advertising sites for poultry are used to communicate with poultry and captive bird owners to raise awareness of the risk and mitigating measures that they can take to prevent Avian influenza.

4. Avian influenza surveillance in Ireland

Ireland carries out both a passive and active surveillance in accordance with Chapter 1.4. on Animal Health Surveillance and Articles 10.4.27 to 10.4.33 of Chapter 10.4. on Infection with Avian influenza viruses. Surveillance carried out in the 3 months following the stamping out policy in addition to those carried out as described in the avian influenza outbreak control measures section above also include national surveillance measures detailed as follows in two categories – wild bird surveillance and poultry surveillance.

Wild bird Surveillance

DAFM operates an early warning detection system which allows for members of the public, wildlife rangers, hunters and veterinarians to notify the Department of any sick or dead wild birds. The birds are collected by trained DAFM and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) personnel and submitted to the Regional Veterinary Laboratories (RVL) for sampling. Samples are then submitted to the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory (CVRL) where Avian Influenza testing is carried out.

A list of species of wild birds to be targeted for surveillance for avian influenza is provided by the *Commission Implementing Decision 2010/367/EU* in accordance with the scientific opinion provided by European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) which is tailored to wild bird species found in Ireland and is updated regularly. This list is amended according to the demographics of each country and updated regularly.

In 2020, the first case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N8 in wild birds was confirmed in Co. Limerick on 10th November. Since then and to date, Ireland has confirmed HPAI in 30 wild birds in species including whooper swans, mute swans, a barnacle goose, curlew, cormorant, knots and peregrine falcons. Of the 30 wild bird avian influenza cases in wild birds to date, 28 were found to be infected with the H5N8 subtype and a different subtype HPAI H5N3 was confirmed in the 2 knot birds.

Number of wild birds tested for Avian influenza in Ireland*						
Year	Total tested- AI M gene PCR	Positives- AI M gene PCR	Positives- H5 gene PCR , N8 gene PCR	Positives- N5 gene PCR, N3 gene PCR	Pathogenicity by cleavage site sequencing	Virus Isolation in SPF eggs**
2020 (01/01/20 – 31/12/20)	165	23	23 x H5N8	None	19 x HPAI 4 x undetermined	1 x H5N8
2021 (01/01/21 – 12/03/21)	66	7	5 x H5N8	2 x H5N3 (same event)	7 x HPAI	1 x H5N3

*Table represents the number of wild birds tested for AI. The number of actual PCR tests carried out is much higher.
** Virus isolation was carried out on initial HPAI confirmed subtype cases in wild birds

Poultry Surveillance

a) Avian influenza H5 and H7 serology testing of poultry under the EU Poultry Surveillance Scheme.

Ireland uses the representative sampling method described in the Commission Implementing Decision 2010/367/EU of 25 June 2010 on the implementation by Member States of surveillance programmes for avian influenza in poultry and wild birds. Sampling and serological testing in poultry holdings is carried out in order to detect the presence of antibodies to H5 and H7 subtypes of avian influenza. Sampling is stratified throughout Ireland so that it is representative of the whole Member state. On farm and slaughter plant sampling is carried out for different categories below and coincides with seasonal production for certain categories e.g., fattening turkeys. Up to 2018 the results were reported to the European Commission, and from 2019 onwards results are submitted to the European Food Safety Authority.

The categories sampled for the EU Poultry Surveillance Scheme include:

Broilers – Free Range	Chicken Breeders
Layers – Free Range	Layers – Non-Free Range
Fattening Turkeys	Turkey Breeders
Fattening Ducks	Fattening Geese

b) Avian influenza serology testing in poultry for the national Poultry Health Programme (PHP)

The Poultry Health Programme is a DAFM surveillance programme to support safe trade in poultry, and to comply with EU regulations and ‘*Council Directive 2009/158/EC of 30 November 2009 on animal health conditions governing intra-Community trade in, and imports from third countries of, poultry and hatching eggs*’. The PHP also includes testing for Mycoplasma and Salmonella. 10,700 samples were tested for avian influenza within the programme from 1st January to 31st December 2020 and a further 2,118 samples were tested between 1st January and 12th March 2021 using the Agar Gel Immunodiffusion test (AGID). All of these AGID tests returned a negative result. In the event that an AGID tests positive, an ELISA test would be applied. If this ELISA test is positive, then H5 and H7 Haemagglutinin Inhibition (HAI) tests are applied. In parallel if ELISA confirms the AGID results an official investigation into the flock is

carried out by DAFM and further sampling and testing would occur in accordance with the requirements of Commission Decision 2006/437/EC. Ireland is also compliant with Article [10.4.30](#). point 1 and Article [10.4.33](#). point 2 of the OIE *Terrestrial Code*. All positive avian influenza PCR detections go forward for virus isolation, enabled by a continuous access to embryonated eggs provided by our institute farm. When an avian influenza virus is isolated, material is then transferred to the EU Reference Laboratory and the national reference laboratory engages with them on the subsequent sequencing process.

5. Conclusion

A stamping out policy was successfully applied to the single outbreak of avian influenza in poultry which was confirmed in a small turkey flock on 10th December 2020. Cleansing and disinfection were carried out on 15th December 2020 on the infected holding. Prior to this outbreak Ireland had remained free of avian influenza since 2nd July 2012. Surveillance is carried out in accordance with Articles 10.4.27 to 10.4.33 of the OIE *Terrestrial Code*. National biosecurity measures are in place for poultry flocks and a comprehensive awareness programme has been implemented.

The Delegate of Ireland to the OIE declares that the country complies with the requirements to declare freedom from avian influenza in poultry as of 15 March 2021, in accordance with Chapter 1.6. and Article 10.4.3. of the OIE *Terrestrial Code* and consistent with the information provided to the OIE - WAHIS system.

Annex I

Statement to be included in the self-declaration document:

I, the undersigned, Dr. Martin Blake, Delegate of Ireland to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), take responsibility for the self-declaration of freedom from Avian Influenza in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 10.4 Infection with Avian influenza viruses of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code

DISCLAIMER

The OIE, after performing an administrative and technical screening of a self-declaration concerning the disease-free status of a country, a zone or compartment (“self-declaration”), as described in the standard operating procedures for self-declarations, reserves the right to publish or not the self-declaration on its website. There shall be no right of appeal from this decision or any recourse of any kind.

The publication by the OIE of self-declaration on its website does not reflect the official opinion of the OIE. Responsibility for the information contained in a self-declaration lies entirely with the OIE Delegate of Member concerned.

Neither the OIE nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for:

(i) Any errors, inaccuracies or omissions in the content of a self-declaration,

Drawn up on 15th March 2021

Signature of the Delegate: Martin Blake