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Self-declaration of the recovery of country freedom from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses (HPAI) in poultry by France

Declaration sent to the OIE on September 03, 2021 by Dr Emmanuelle Soubeyran, Delegate of France to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), Directorate General of Food.

I. High pathogenicity avian influenza situation in France

While free in accordance with the criteria of Article 10.4.3 of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code, France notified 492 outbreaks of H5N8 infection in poultry between 17 November 2020 and 18 May 2021, in compliance with the provisions of Article 1.1 of the same Code. These notifications were the subject of 41 reports (initial and follow-up notifications). The last outbreak was reported on 26 April 2021.

The outbreaks affected 15 of the 101 French departments. 3 departments (Landes (40), Gers (32) and Pyrénées-Atlantiques (64)) concentrated 95% of the outbreaks.

On the basis of the phylogenetic analyses carried out, ANSES¹ indicates, in its notice of 26/05/2021, the identification of only 5 strains for the South-West departments, Deux-Sèvres and Vendée, in connection with contacts with wild birds. In addition, during the same period, 22 outbreaks in wildlife were identified and notified. These events are closed.

¹ Agence nationale de sécurité sanitaire de l'alimentation, de l'environnement et du travail, Maisons-Alfort, France

Table 1 : Number of HPAI outbreaks in poultry in France since 07/11/2020

Nombre de foyers en élevage de volaille		
Sud-ouest	Landes (40)	341
	Gers (32)	66
	Pyrénées-Atlantiques (64)	58
	Hautes-Pyrénées (65)	7
	Lot-et-Garonne (47)	2
	Haute-Garonne (31)	1
	subtotal	475
Hors sud-ouest	Deux-sèvres (79)	1
	Vendée (85)	3
	Haute-Corse (2B)	6
	Corse-du-sud (2A)	1
	Yvelines (78)	1
	Haut-Rhin (68)	1
	Bas-Rhin	1
	Haute-Savoie (74)	1
	Ardennes (08)	2
	subtotal	17
TOTAL France		492

Map N° 1 : location of outbreaks (source WAHIS)



II. HPAI control and eradication strategy

II.1. Outbreaks detected in domestic farms

The outbreaks detected led to the stamping out of poultry on the affected farms. Protection zones (PZ) of 3km and surveillance zones (SZ) of 10km were established in accordance with EU regulations (Directive 2005/942 and Regulation 2020/687) (Table 2). They were defined geographically from municipal boundaries and could therefore extend beyond a 3km or 10km radius.

Epidemiological investigations were carried out for each outbreak, including the recording of delivery routes, movements of people and, in the case of animals transferred from an outbreak, the identification of all poultry farms along the routes used to reach the targeted farms.

Table 2 : Measures implemented in the PZ and SZ:

Measures implemented in the PZ and SZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of all commercial farms. • Reinforcement of protection and biosecurity measures on farms • Ban on the introduction of birds into farms • Implementation of cleaning, disinfection and sanitary vacuum measures • Priority implementation of epidemiological investigations to detect possible new cases and to understand the spread and origin of the disease • Ban on the movement of poultry and gatherings of birds
Additional measures in PZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census of backyard flocks • Health visits to all commercial farms and backyard premises • Prohibition on placing unplucked poultry on the market for supply to the consumer in its unplucked state • Recommendation to confine backyard birds

II.2. Eradication strategy according to the area

II.2.1. Preventive culling

In the greater South-West (5 departments 32, 40, 47, 64 and 65) and on the basis of the ANSES opinion of 7 January 2021, the epizootic management strategy was based on:

- Preventive culling within a radius of 3 km around the outbreaks in the whole of departments 32, 40, 64 and 65, and in a few communes in 47; in the first kilometre it concerns all birds without distinction, for the following 2 km it targets all palmipeds and other non-claviculated poultry
- Progressive depopulation of a large buffer zone in the 5 departments which includes all the regulated zones (3/10 km protection and surveillance zones in accordance with Directive 2005/94/EC) as well as the communes located within a 10km radius beyond the limits of the surveillance zones, i.e. 20km around the outbreaks. In each department, the zone is defined by prefectural order. In this buffer zone, birds are brought to the end of their production but repopulation is not authorised. In addition, there must be no entry or exit of birds (all poultry, including farmed game) as in the classical

restricted zones. The lifting of the buffer zone is linked to the lifting of all the restricted zones it surrounds.

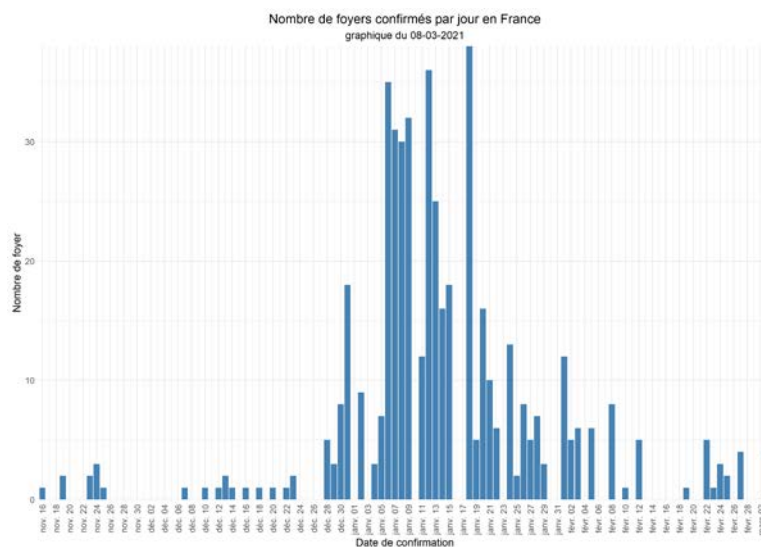
Veterinary visits were made to all poultry farms in these areas and samples were taken for testing. All movement of poultry was prohibited until the situation had stabilised. These visits were a prerequisite for the subsequent lifting of the protection and surveillance zones.

Given the low number of HPAI outbreaks (18 outbreaks = 3.65%) in the other 10 affected departments, and the lack of spread of the disease in each of these departments, all health management measures in accordance with EU regulations were applied without the use of preventive culling.

II.2.2 Impact of the depopulation strategy in the South West:

After 10 weeks of application of the preventive culling strategy (more than 3.5 million birds) and application of the buffer zone, the number of outbreaks detected in the southwest on a daily basis has almost stopped (Figure 1). The last outbreak was reported on 26 March 2021.

Figure 1 : dynamics of contamination



II.2.3. Lifting of restricted zones and sanitary vacuum

In view of the stabilisation of the disease situation in the departments of the greater South-West and mainly in the department of Landes, a strategy for lifting the protection zones and the sanitary vacuum of all outbreak farms and preventively depopulated farms was put in place as of 18 March 2021. The objective of this strategy was to repopulate galliform poultry farms (*Gallus gallus*) after the sanitary vacuum. The repopulation of palmiped flocks was postponed due to their higher susceptibility to the H5N8 virus. Repopulation only took place once the epizootic was over, after an additional sanitation period of 4 weeks around the former outbreaks.

To date, all restricted zones in accordance with European Union regulations throughout the country have been lifted.

The 15 affected departments have recovered their free status in accordance with the provisions of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* Chapter 10.4, thus determining the recovery of free status for France on 2 September 2021.

III. National measures to protect farms and local wildlife

Reinforced protection measures were taken throughout mainland France on 16 November 2020 in order to prevent the contamination of domestic livestock and local wildlife by migratory wildlife.

These measures are as follows:

- Mandatory containment or netting to prevent contact of domestic birds with avifauna, with exemptions possible only for commercial farms if justified on animal welfare grounds. These exemptions are granted following a veterinary biosecurity visit;
- Reinforced biosecurity measures in commercial farms;
- Prohibition on the assembly of live poultry, except under controlled biosecurity conditions;
- Prohibition on the release of waterfowl and pigeons; restrictions on the release of pheasants and partridges and the use of lures for waterfowl hunting.

In view of the favourable evolution of the sanitary situation, the French Ministry of Agriculture has downgraded the level of national risk of contamination from "high" (ministerial decree of 16/11/2021) to "moderate" (ministerial decree of 23 April 2021), then from "moderate" to "negligible" by the decree of 27 May 2021

IV. Surveillance

IV.1. Enhanced (passive) event-based surveillance.

The Ministerial Decree of 18 January 2008 sets technical and administrative measures for the control of high and low pathogenic avian influenza: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000017958300/>.

Thus, the surveillance targets all highly pathogenic influenza type A viruses belonging to the H5 or H7 subtypes or having an intravenous pathogenicity index greater than 1.2, and low pathogenic H5 or H7 subtypes whose intravenous pathogenicity index is less than 1.2.

In poultry

Event-based surveillance has been reinforced in domestic poultry farms with a call for vigilance on the part of all those involved in the sector: any abnormal death, decrease in egg laying or lower consumption of water or feed should be considered as a potential clinical suspicion of avian influenza. In accordance with the Chapter 2, Article 4 of the above-mentioned Ministerial decree of 18 January 2008, the official veterinarian suspecting a case of avian influenza is required to notify without delay the Departmental Director of the Veterinary Services where the suspect animal is located: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000017958300/>

In wild birds

Since November 2020, the event-based surveillance of wild bird mortality (collection of dead birds considered to be of concern with regard to avian influenza) has also been intensified throughout the country. The vigilance of the actors involved in the national surveillance network of the hunting sector (public-private partnership) has been reinforced. From 1 January to 31 May, 385 reports of abnormal deaths of wild birds were reported and analysed. After analysis of these reports, 21 outbreaks were confirmed. After the 31st of May, one outbreak in a backyard was reported "in birds other than poultry including wild birds", in accordance with the new provisions of the *Terrestrial Code*, bringing the number of outbreaks to 22. All outbreaks have been notified to the OIE.

IV.2. Scheduled (active) surveillance.

- **Serological Survey**

In accordance with Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/689 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council with regards to the rules applicable to surveillance, eradication programs and disease-free status for certain listed and emerging diseases: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020R0689>,

France has established a surveillance program. The criteria, for the 2021 campaign, for targeting poultry, the age and the type of sampling and their number are detailed in Table 3 below.

Species/production type	Specific targeting	Minimum age in weeks	Minimum number of samples per farm	Primary serological test used	Sampling location
Gallus reproducteurs	-	35	10 PS	IDG	Breeding farm
Laying hens open air	-	35	10 PS	IDG	Breeding farm
Laying hens in buildings	-	35	10 PS	IDG	Breeding farm
Turkeys	-	8	10 PS	ELISA NP	Breeding farm
Breeding turkeys	-	35	10 PS	ELISA NP	Breeding farm
Breeding and future breeding ducks	Future mean-age breeder (10-14 weeks) Breeding at the end of laying or moulting period	10	40 PS + 20 EC + 20 ET	IHA	Breeding farm
		35			
PAG and force-fed ducks	Poultry older than 8 weeks Priority to self-sufficient farms	8	20 PS + 20 EC + 20 ET	IHA	Breeding farm
Roasting ducks	-	8	20 PS + 20 EC + 20 ET	IHA	Breeding farm
Breeding and future breeding geese	Future mean-age breeder (10-14 weeks) Breeding at the end of laying or moulting period	10	40 PS + 20 EC + 20 ET	IHA	Breeding farm
		35			
Fattening geese	Poultry older than 8 weeks	8	20 PS + 20 EC + 20 ET	IHA	Breeding farm
Gallinaceous game (pheasants, partridges)	-	8	20 PS	IHA	Breeding farm
Palmipeds games	-		20 PS + 20 EC + 20 ET	IHA	Breeding farm

PS = blood sample; EC = cloacal swab; ET = oropharyngeal or tracheal swab

Below are the results of the serological survey conducted in 2020:

	2020		
	nombre d'élevages prélevés	nombre d'élevages H5 séropositifs	pourcentage élevages H5 positifs * [IC à 95%]
Canard Engraissement (canard PAG + canard à rôtir)	241 (dont 1 ininterprétable)	4	1,7% [0,1-3,3]
Canard reproducteur	78 (dont 4 ininterprétables)	1	1,4% [0,0-7,3]
Oie Engraissement	55	0	0% [0,0-8,5]
Oie reproductrice	28 (dont 1 ininterprétable)	0	0% [0,0-12,8]
Gibier gallinacé (faisan + perdrix)	42	0	0% [0,0-8,4]
Gibier palmipède (canard colvert)	15	1	6,7% [0,2-32,0]
Dinde à l'engrais (dinde PA + dinde bâtiment)	46	0	0% [0,0-7,9]
Dinde reproductrice	48	0	0% [0,0-7,4]
Poule reproductrice	55	0	0% [0,0-8,5]
Poule pondeuse	33	0	0% [0,0-10,6]
Poule pondeuse plein air	52	0	0% [0,0-8,9]
TOTAL	693	6	

* Percentage calculated in relation to the number of farms or establishment with interpretable results

As soon as an outbreak is identified:

- In the protection zone, all farms were visited by a veterinarian
- Samples were taken from the farms:
 - Palmiped commercial farms located in the protection and surveillance zone: systematic sampling of a minimum of 20 birds for virological analysis (20 cloacal swabs and 20 tracheal or oropharyngeal swabs)
 - Commercial farms of other birds located in the protection zone: systematic sampling of a minimum of 20 birds for virological analysis (20 cloacal swabs and 20 tracheal or oropharyngeal swabs).
 - Non-commercial (backyard) farms located within 500m of the outbreak (20 cloacal swabs and 20 tracheal or oropharyngeal swabs) even if there are no palmipeds.
 - The analyses were carried out in approved and accredited laboratories.

Below are the results of the surveillance conducted around the outbreaks and in the restricted zones (Protection Zone (PZ) and Surveillance Zone (STZ)) in 2021

Species	Type of production	Number of sites	Type of test	Result of the test
PALMIPÈDES	Force-feeding phase	56	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
PALMIPÈDES	Pre-feeding phase	35	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
PALMIPÈDES	Breeding	21	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
LEAN POULTRY	Broiler	134	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
LEAN POULTRY	Breeding	7	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
LEAN POULTRY	Laying	41	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
LOWER COURT	Lower hen	122	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
Game birds	Breeding	5	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
PALMIPÈDES	Breeding	25	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
Game birds	Breeding	4	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
Turkey	Meat	3	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
PINTADE	Meat	3	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
Birds of ornament	Birds of ornament	1	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
CAILLES	Meat	1	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE
PIGEONS	Meat	1	RT-PCR	NEGATIVE

Import of live birds or poultry products:

France applies all measures for the import of live birds or poultry products in accordance with Commission Regulation (EC) No 798/2008 of 8 August 2008 laying down a list of third countries, territories, zones or compartments from which poultry and poultry products may be imported into and transit through the Community and with the veterinary certification requirements: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32008R0798>

V. Conclusion

1. Prior to the occurrence of new outbreak in November 2020, France was free from highly pathogenic avian influenza in poultry, according to the Article 10.4.3. of the OIE *Terrestrial Code* (edition 2019);
2. Strict control and eradication measures have been adopted, with total culling of the birds and cleaning and disinfection of all affected farms, in accordance with OIE regulations;
3. A preventive culling around the outbreaks in the southwestern French departments has been implemented within a radius of 5 km around the outbreaks according to the ministerial order of January 11, 2021;
4. Surveillance was conducted in accordance with Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30. of the OIE *Terrestrial Code*;

5. More than 28 days have elapsed since a stamping-out policy has been completed of the last HPAI outbreak in the last exploitation reached.
6. France has an early warning system to detect HPAI.

The OIE Delegate of France declares that the country complies with the requirements for a country free from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza in poultry as of 02 September 2021, in accordance with Article 10.4.6. of the Terrestrial Code (2021), and consistent with the information provided in OIE-WAHIS.

Annex I

Direction générale de l'alimentation

Je, soussignée, **EMMANUELLE SOUBEYRAN**,

Déléguée de la **FRANCE** auprès de l'Organisation mondiale de la santé animale (OIE), assume la responsabilité de l'auto-déclaration indemne **d'influenza aviaire hautement pathogène**

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- 4 OCT. 2021

Rédigée le/...../.....

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