

Media Release

Friday 31 July 2020 | Media contact: Nicole Cairns 0436 675 030

VICTORIAN PROPERTY POSITIVE FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA

A free-range egg farm near Lethbridge has tested positive for H7N7 avian influenza virus.

Avian influenza (sometimes known as 'bird flu') is a highly contagious disease that predominantly affects chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, guinea fowl, quail, pheasants and ostriches. Many species of wild birds, including waterfowl and seabirds, can also carry the virus.

Victoria's Chief Veterinary Officer Dr Graeme Cooke said movement controls have been put in place for Golden Plains Shire; a Restricted Area buffer zone established within a radius of 5km from the infected premises; as well as the affected property being placed under quarantine.

"These controls prohibit the movement of birds, related equipment and products within and out of, the designated Control Area of Golden Plains Shire unless a permit for movement has been granted by Agriculture Victoria until further notice. Thank you for your cooperation with this." Dr Cooke said.

All pigeon races, bird shows and bird sales in the Golden Plains Shire should be cancelled.

"Poultry farmers, back yard flock and bird owners are urged to report any cases of unexplained bird deaths to the 24-hour Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888, to your local vet or to Agriculture Victoria animal health staff," Dr Cooke said.

Dr Cooke also advises domestic bird and backyard chook owners in the Control Area to ensure all their birds are kept separate from all other birds.

Signs of the disease may include:

- sudden death
- birds with difficulty breathing, such as coughing, sneezing, or rasping
- swelling and purple discolouration of the head, comb, wattles and neck
- rapid drop in eating, drinking and egg production
- ruffled feathers, drowsiness, closed eyes
- diarrhoea.

To stop the spread of avian influenza, birds on the affected property are being destroyed.

"Agriculture Victoria is conducting surveillance throughout the Restricted Area buffer zone to determine whether the virus is contained to the property or whether it may be active in other areas."

The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services confirmed the H7N7 virus is not a risk to the public as it rarely affects humans unless there is direct and close contact with sick birds. Workers and biosecurity officers at the affected property will take all necessary precautions, including wearing Protective Personal Equipment (PPE).

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There are no food safety issues identified; properly cooked chicken meat and eggs are safe to eat.

If you have had contact with birds on an affected property and you are experiencing cold or flu symptoms, call your doctor or the Department of Health and Human Services on 1300 651 160 for medical advice.

Australia has previously experienced incursions of highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses which were successfully eradicated.

Dr Cooke said this was a reminder to all bird owners, however many birds they have, to always practice good biosecurity, whether at home, sales, bird shows or race events; and especially taking small but important measures to discourage wild birds mixing with domestic birds, such as ensuring no access to the domestic birds food.

Further information on protective measures, including movement controls can be found at: agriculture.vic.gov.au