

Avian flu hits again

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Zimbabwe - Lanark Farm in Beatrice has been hit again by a highly pathogenic Avian influenza, the second time that the farm has had such an attack. The first outbreak, which killed thousands of chickens, occurred in May. The current outbreak has been confirmed by the laboratory to be linked to the first one caused by the avian influenza - H5N8 type virus.



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Ministry of Agriculture, Mechanisation and Irrigation Development, Department of Livestock and Veterinary Services acting principal director, Dr Josphat Nyika confirmed the outbreak on Friday. "We would like to inform the nation, trade and development partners of the recurrence of highly pathogenic avian influenza or bird flu outbreak at Lanark Farm on Monday," he said.

"Lanark Farm is a registered poultry compartment situated 25 kilometres south of Harare. It is the only farm in the country that has been affected by the disease and every effort is being made to prevent infection from escaping the establishment."

Nyika said the disease had initially been detected and confirmed in May this year and the situation had stabilised following complete depopulation of affected poultry sites by 1 June 2017. "The farm had been in quarantine under veterinary supervision since then and will now remain in quarantine for three months or until the disease is completely resolved," he said.

"All birds in the newly affected sites were destroyed and buried together with their litter on site."

Hightened surveillance

Nyika said his department was maintaining heightened countrywide clinical and serological surveillance in all commercial poultry production farms, live poultry markets and areas close to big water bodies.

He requested all poultry farmers and the general public to report any incidences of high mortalities of domestic or wild birds to their nearest veterinary offices.

The outbreak of avian influenza involved the serotype H5N8 of the avian influenza virus, which had been spreading in a second wave around the world since 2010. The virus has been re-introduced to Europe from Asia, where it remained in continuous circulation and was detected in Uganda, among other countries in Africa, earlier this year.

Influenza viruses are highly contagious and therefore spread very quickly in susceptible populations. The viruses occur naturally in wild water birds. However, the viruses change dynamically and highly virulent strains can occur from time to time, causing major human and animal illness and death.

Unlike other serotypes, which have caused concern in past years, H5N8 wherever it has occurred recently, has not shown any risk to humans. Symptoms of avian influenza include quick illness and sudden deaths.

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