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NEWS RELEASE

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Avian Influenza H5N1 confirmed in wild birds in Dorset

Defra has today confirmed Avian Influenza in three dead wild mute swans in the Chesil Beach area in Dorset, following positive test results from the Veterinary Laboratories Agency for the highly pathogenic strain of H5N1. These birds were found and tested following our routine surveillance programme.

A Wild Bird Control Area and Monitoring Area are being established around the premises, encompassing Chesil Beach and Portland Bill, and the shape of these is based on expert ornithological advice.

Inside these areas bird keepers are required to house their birds or otherwise isolate them from contact with wild birds, bird movements will be restricted, and bird gatherings are banned. Defra is also working closely with ornithological and other experts to consider what wider measures may be needed.

No disease has been found in domestic birds, and a programme of surveillance is being carried out in the local wild bird population. There will be no culling of wild birds because such action may disperse birds further and would not aid control.

Acting Chief Veterinary Officer Fred Landeg said:

“While this is obviously unwelcome news, we have always said that Britain is at a constant low level of risk of introduction of Avian Influenza. Our message to all bird keepers, particularly those in the area, is that they must be vigilant, report any signs of disease immediately, and practice the highest levels of biosecurity.”

A full epidemiological investigation is underway.

All poultry keepers on the GB Poultry Register are being notified, and the EU Commission has been informed.

Notes to editors

1. Information is available from the Defra Helpline (08459 33 55 77) - see www.defra.gov.uk for current opening hours. Bird keepers can also call the Animal Health recorded information line for the latest updates on 0844 884 4600.
2. Avian Influenza is a disease of birds. While it can pass very rarely and with difficulty to humans, this usually requires extremely close contact with infected birds, particularly faeces. Advice from the Food Standards Agency remains that properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.
3. All Avian Influenza (H1 to H16) can be low pathogenic but only H5 and H7 are known to become highly pathogenic.
4. Inside the Control Area and the Monitoring Area, the measures required by the EU Wild Bird Decision will be applied, including bird movements which will be restricted.
5. All poultry keepers registered with the GB Poultry Register will be contacted by text message with updates. All poultry keepers responsible for a premises with 50 or more birds are legally required to register. Defra strongly encourages those with less than 50 birds to register voluntarily.
6. The details on the measures that apply in the current zones can be found on the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk/avianflu
7. This is the second highly pathogenic H5N1 Avian Influenza case detected in a wild bird in the British Isles. The previous case was the swan found in Cellardyke, Fife in April 2006.
8. Recent H5N1 cases in commercial poultry in Britain:
November 2007 – premises near Diss, Norfolk
February 2007 – premises in Upper Holton, Suffolk
October 2005 – quarantine premises in Essex

End

Public enquiries: 08459 335577

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