

## Omlet - 19 October 2005

### Avian Influenza Fact Sheet.

If you keep chickens or are thinking about keeping chickens, the reporting on the current situation with avian flu has been quite confusing. To help to clear up the current situation we have written this Fact Sheet based on the advice available from DEFRA and the Health Protection Agency, the principal agency providing advice to the Department of Health and the NHS.

#### Q. What is avian influenza?

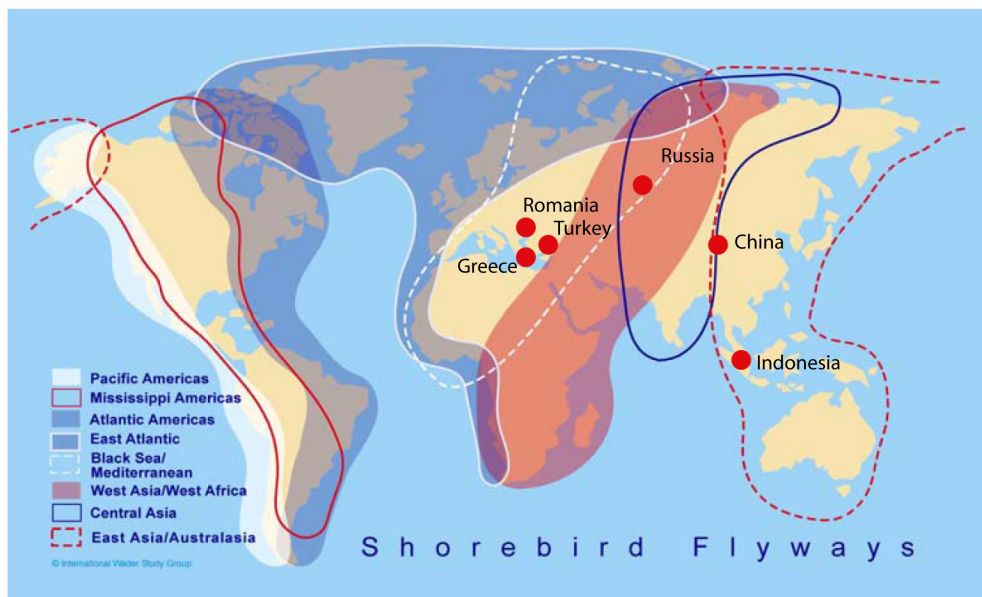
Avian influenza is a virus that affects mainly birds. It acts very quickly affecting their respiratory systems usually causing death in less than 48 hours. It has been present in the wild bird population of south eastern Asia for some time. Earlier this year cases were discovered in eastern Russia and more recently in central Europe.

#### Q. Will it come to the UK?

Avian influenza appears to be carried by migrating waterfowl such as ducks, geese and swans who can transmit it to domestic flocks of poultry such as chickens and turkeys.

It is highly unlikely that avian influenza will come to the UK as the waterfowl that spend the winter here come from arctic areas of North America, Greenland, Iceland and Scandinavia and not from the infected areas such as Asia and Russia. You can see this pattern on the map below taken from <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/monitoring/pdf/hpai-turkrom.pdf>

The current outbreaks of avian influenza in central and eastern Europe have been caused by infected birds migrating south from Russia over countries such as Romania and Turkey on their way to northern Africa.



The map above shows the migration patterns of birds around the world. The red dots show the areas where there have been confirmed cases of avian influenza in the last year. The white dotted area and the red shaded area show the migratory paths of the birds which are thought to be spreading the virus from south Russia. There is very little movement east to west of migrating birds, and the UK is not thought to be at risk from infection via this route.

**Q. What if avian influenza did come to the UK?**

Like the cases in Romania and Turkey, if the virus were to be discovered in the UK it would be isolated and eradicated quickly. This was the case in 1992 when a Turkey farm in Norfolk became infected. The virus was successfully contained to just this one farm.

**Q. What is the risk of catching avian influenza if I keep chickens?**

If you keep a small number of chickens in your back garden the chances of them becoming infected is extremely small. Large farms with free range flocks close to wetland areas are considered to be most at risk and naturally they are being extremely vigilant so that any signs of the disease are picked up and dealt with immediately.

This is a quote from the UK Health Protection Agency website 17th October 05:

“There have been no reports of avian flu A (H5N1) in wild or domestic birds in the UK whatsoever. The risk of infection from domestic or wild birds is therefore extremely low. There are no cases of avian flu H5N1 animal infection elsewhere in Europe and there are no human cases in Turkey or anywhere else in Europe linked to this outbreak.”

**Q. Is there anything I can do to at the moment?**

No, as avian flu is not present in this country there are no special measures to take. Generally it will be large farms that will be required to take precautions such as keeping free range flocks inside and disinfecting equipment that is moved between farms. We will of course keep you updated if the situation changes.

**Q. Where can I find out more?**

Two reliable sources of information are the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Health Protection Agency (HPA). Both are responsible for the health and safety of the population and while DEFRA is a government department, the HPA is an independent body.

The DEFRA webpage for avian flu can be found here:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/index.htm>

and the relevant pages of the HPA are:

[http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics\\_az/avianinfluenza/avianflufaq.htm](http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/avianinfluenza/avianflufaq.htm)

**Alternatively, please feel free to call us directly on 0845 450 2056**

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