

## Avian influenza detected in WCape poultry farms

The Western Cape Veterinary Services has issued a warning to poultry farmers in the Paardeberg area, specifically in the Drakenstein and Swartland Local Municipalities, after confirming the detection of avian influenza in two commercial layer farms.



Source: ©123branex via [123RF](#)

Approximately 120, 000 birds have died or have been destroyed.

The first outbreak was confirmed on Friday, 21 April, and the second on Tuesday, 25 April. The exact strain involved is still unknown and is being investigated.

Highly pathogenicity avian influenza outbreaks have been occurring worldwide and were detected in poultry in other South African provinces earlier in 2023 and throughout 2022. However, the Western Cape has not seen the virus in commercial poultry since early last year.

Avian influenza is a viral disease spread by direct contact between healthy and infected birds or through indirect contact

with contaminated equipment or other materials.

The virus is present in infected birds' faeces and discharges from their noses, mouth and eyes. In addition, domestic birds can be infected through faecal contamination of the environment from wild birds or by indirect contact with infected poultry on other premises.

There is currently no vaccine or treatment for highly pathogenic avian influenza. As a result, current practice in much of the world requires culling infected birds as quickly as possible to limit the spread of the disease.

## **Public and agriculture sector to be vigilant**

Farmers and poultry producers should be vigilant in their biosecurity measures to prevent potential virus introduction from wild birds or their faeces through the following steps:

- Access to properties should be restricted as far as possible;
- Keeping poultry away from wild birds and their body fluids is essential;
- Avoid the introduction of the virus through contaminated clothes, footwear, vehicles or farm equipment;
- Vehicles entering properties should be disinfected upon entering and exiting;
- Do not allow people who have had contact with poultry in the last 48 hours onto your property; and
- Using footbaths upon entry and exit to poultry houses is advised to disinfect footwear.

Although the risk of avian influenza being transmitted to humans remains low, experts advise that members of the public should avoid touching dead birds. In addition, we advise particular caution when handling or slaughtering potentially infected poultry; gloves, a mask and eye protection should be worn.

Poultry products from grocery stores are safe for consumption.

Avian influenza is controlled under the Animal Diseases Act, 35 of 1984. Any suspicion of the disease – in wild or domestic birds – must be reported to the local state veterinarian. Contact details are available [here](#).

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