



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA BRIEFING BY MINISTER SENZENI ZOKWANA

AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Good morning

The Department alerted poultry owners about the eminent threat of Avian Influenza when Zimbabwe reported their first case at the end of May. The disease, which at that time had been reported in 14 countries, 2 of which were in Africa, had been confirmed in Zimbabwe making it the third country in Africa to be affected.

Avian Influenza is an influenza virus, and is classified as either highly pathogenic or low pathogenic by the World Organisation for Animal Health. The type that has been reported is the highly pathogenic one and is extremely contagious.

The Department, in its alert notification, called for all chicken keepers to observe basic biosecurity measures in order to prevent contact with wild birds. This can be achieved in commercial farms by improving biosecurity and in free range farms by simply removing feed and water from where it attracts wild birds.

Despite the warnings, the disease still managed to get into our flocks. Two cases, one in a broiler breeder farm in Villiers and another in an egg laying farm in Standerton, were reported since 22nd of June. Both these farms are in the Mpumalanga province. There seems to have been confusion with the location of one farm which is near Villiers, as its closest town. I confirm that this farm is on the Mpumalanga side of the provincial boundary. No cases have been reported so far in the Free State, or in any other province.

Our team of veterinarians has swiftly responded to this threat. We have placed the affected farms under quarantine and the affected birds have been euthanised and the eggs destroyed. Approximately two hundred and sixty thousand (260 000) birds have been culled.

Section 19 of the Animal Diseases Act, gives the Director Animal Health the legal mandate to compensate for any animals or birds killed by the state pursuant to any disease control measure. The Director of Animal Health will consider each case on its own merit.

There have been several calls to permit vaccination against the disease; I have been advised by my team of experts that this will not be in the best interest of both the country and the producers. Vaccination of birds will create an endemic situation, affect surveillance efforts and affect our export certification because all our trade partners only want products from a country that is free of avian influenza where vaccination is not practised.

In order to contain the disease, our team called for the ban on the sale of live chickens to manage the further spread. This triggered a nation-wide concern since a number of livelihoods had been affected. However this measure was imposed in the interest of the country and the poultry producers at large, and I can assure you that it was not taken lightly.

My team has since met with the Poultry Producers and have devised a solution that will provide the desired disease management outcomes and improve traceability, while ensuring that micro businesses continue with their operations. The buyers or sellers of more than 5 live chickens for any purpose other than direct slaughter at a registered abattoir will be subjected to the following conditions:

1. The sellers of live chickens, including commercial farmers, as well as the traders who buy and resell these chickens must register with the Poultry Disease Management Agency (PDMA). The Director Animal Health, of the DAFF has authorised the PDMA to register and keep records of all parties selling and buying live chickens. The PDMA is an independent organization and all information about the trade of live chickens will be kept strictly confidential.
2. Only registered sellers and buyers are allowed to trade and it is the responsibility of both the seller and the buyer to ensure that their counterpart is registered.
3. Farmers may only sell live chickens certified as healthy by a veterinarian or Animal Health Technician.
4. Traders may only sell healthy chickens and must keep records as prescribed.
5. Sellers and buyers registering with the PDMA would have to sign an undertaking to adhere to the required control measures.

These conditions apply to sellers of live broiler chickens, live spent layer hens, live spent breeder birds, point of lay pullets and any chickens that may fall into these categories. The conditions also apply to any buyers and traders who buy more than 5 live chickens that fall into the above categories.

All stakeholders are implored to comply with the registration and other requirements that are designed to allow the trade of live chickens to continue without compromising animal health. Depending on the level of compliance that is achieved with these conditions, the Director Animal Health will review future requirements for blanket bans.

Registration forms for sellers and buyers are available on the DAFF (www.daff.gov.za) and PDMA (www.poultrydiseases.co.za) websites and further information can also be obtained from the PDMA (at 012 529 8298).

We request utmost cooperation of all affected parties in order to prevent further spread of the current outbreak and enhance the disease management efforts.

The Department wishes to reiterate that the type of virus we are dealing with, does not affect people, as has been confirmed by the World Health Organisation and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

The meat that is on the shelves is safe to eat as it has gone through a process of meat inspection and certified fit for human consumption.

A number of trade partners, have suspended trade of raw meat, eggs and live birds from South Africa. This is mainly because the South African veterinarians have to certify that the country is free of Avian Influenza, and since the 22nd June, they could not provide this certification. However, processed meat is considered safe for trade, and some countries still accept this.

South Africa introduced the concept of compartments in line with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) guidelines; raw meat, eggs and live birds originating from these compartments have been accepted by most trade partners. Our team is already in negotiations with these trade partners to accept our products from these registered compartments.

Chicken owners, farmers and the public should remain vigilant and all cases of high mortalities in chickens and other birds should be reported to the nearest State Veterinarian.

I wish to thank the Poultry Producers for their cooperation and consistent engagement with the Department. I also wish to thank my team for the swift response and their dedication.

Ke a leboha.