

North West on Bird Flu outbreak in parts of the Province

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Bird Flu outbreak in parts of North West Province - Farmers urged to exercise caution

The Department of Rural, Environment and Agricultural Development (READ) would like to confirm that parts of the Bokone Bophirima province has been hit by an outbreak of High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) commonly known as Bird Flu. Two of the outbreaks are in Madibeng (in Bojanala Platinum District) and one in Maquassie Hills. One of the outbreaks involving commercial flock involves quails that are hatched, grown and slaughtered on the farm. The second outbreak in Madibeng involved wild ducks that were kept domestically as pets for recreational reasons. The two outbreaks are within a vicinity of less than 10km of each other. The third outbreak was detected in a semi commercial farm in Maquassie Hills.

In all outbreak farms a dedicated team from the Department of READ has been set aside to deal with the infected households to avoid spreading of the disease. The teams will continue to take samples randomly from remaining birds in instance where the birds were not totally culled. A different team of officials has been deployed to collect information from surrounding farms within a three km radius from the index farms. This was done to assess the extent of the spread to neighbouring farms.

The farms and plots affected have been put under quarantine and the terms of the quarantine explained to the owners. The owners have been advised on bio-security measures that were to be taken to prevent spreading of the virus to neighbouring houses by humans and also by faeces of affected birds. They have also been advised to secure bird enclosures with bird nets to prevent wild birds from entering them. As the wild birds are often attracted to the domestic cages by available left over food, farmers were also advised to remove feed when it is not finished.

Avian Influenza is a viral disease of poultry that affects both domestic and wild birds. Wild birds are more resistant to the disease and tend to harbour it without showing any adverse clinical signs. However in situations of excessive stress, the animals' immune system becomes compromised and it may start showing clinical signs or sheds the virus. Domesticated poultry is highly susceptible to the virus and if they come into contact with it, results in heavy mortalities.

The primary source of infection in domesticated flock is contact with wild birds. It spreads within a farm through carriers like utensils, workers and their clothes and contaminated litter.

The poultry farmers in all the areas have been informed about the risk. Private Veterinarians have also been requested to assist farmers with biosecurity measures. The community at large is requested to report any increased mortality of birds that is noticed to the nearest State Veterinary office.

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