

Avian Influenza: H5 and H7 outbreak update report

26 May 2023



**agriculture, land reform
& rural development**

Department:
Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Report compiled by:
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Please note: This report includes all information as available by close of business on 26 May 2023. *Avian Influenza update reports will from now on be issued on a fortnightly basis.*

1. Introduction and Background

Avian influenza is a highly contagious viral disease that affects several species of food producing birds, pet birds and wild birds. Occasionally other mammals, including humans, may also contract avian influenza. H5 and H7 avian influenza are classified into two categories according to the severity of disease it causes in poultry namely low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). LPAI strains cause few or no clinical signs in poultry while HPAI strains may cause severe clinical signs and potentially high mortality rates among poultry. Both categories had to be reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, founded as OIE). This was reviewed and since 1 January 2022, only HPAI in poultry and birds other than poultry are reportable to the WOAH. LPAI has to be reported only when there is proof that natural transmission with severe consequences in humans occurred.

Poultry is defined by the WOAH as all domesticated birds, used for the production of meat or eggs for consumption, for the production of other commercial products, for restocking supplies of game, or for breeding these categories of birds, as well as fighting cocks used for any purpose. Backyard poultry is excluded from the WOAH definition of poultry only if the birds are kept in a single household, the products of which are used within the same household exclusively with no direct or indirect contact with poultry or poultry facilities (2021 OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code).

Outbreaks of HPAI in poultry may result in trade bans on the export of poultry and poultry products. Reporting of HPAI outbreaks in non-poultry (e.g. wild birds, pet birds, birds kept as a hobby, backyard poultry as defined by the 2021 OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code), to the WOAH do not have trade implications.

In South Africa, avian influenza of any subtype is a controlled animal disease in terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No 35 of 1984). Any suspect or confirmed case of avian influenza of any subtype must be reported immediately to the responsible state veterinarian in terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No 35 of 1984). Both passive and active surveillance for avian influenza are conducted across the country in order to detect any incursion of avian influenza. Passive and active surveillance in backyard and commercial chickens is continuing across the country. A number of backyard chicken holdings in all Provinces are included in the six-monthly active surveillance. Active surveillance in commercial chickens is conducted every six months with monthly surveillance in NAI free compartments. Active surveillance in commercial ostriches is conducted six monthly with additional pre-movement, pre-slaughter, and 28 days post-movement testing.

In 2017 the first case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) was confirmed in commercial chickens in South Africa. This was confirmed as HPAI H5N8. No new HPAI outbreaks were reported in commercial and backyard chickens since June 2018 until the detection in April 2021 of a HPAI H5N1 in commercial chickens. A HPAI H5N2 was detected in October 2022 in chickens of a small-scale farmer facility in KwaZulu-Natal Province in 2022. This is the first ever HPAI H5N2 in chickens in the country. HPAI H5N2 was detected in ostriches during 2004, 2006 and 2011.

Current H5 and H7 avian influenza outbreaks within the country are summarised in this report and are categorised according to pathogenicity (HPAI, LPAI or undefined). The HPAI outbreaks are discussed under point 2 and LPAI is discussed in point 3.

2. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)

There has been a sudden upsurge in H5 PCR positive samples. Pathotyping, N typing and sequencing is currently under way. The majority of H5 PCR positive samples are samples collected under an environmental research project for wild bird surveillance and originated from Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal and Mpumalanga Provinces. Samples from shorebirds from the Western Cape Province from four different locations as well as samples from wild birds from one Nature Reserve were also confirmed to be HPAI H5 PCR positive. Five commercial chicken facilities in the Western Cape were confirmed to be HPAI H5.

All HPAI suspect farms are immediately placed under quarantine and no movement of birds, eggs or products are allowed on, off or through these farms. Samples are collected for verification of the suspicion and back and forward tracing is implemented to detect any possible spread of disease. So far most of the affected properties have culled out the chickens and carcasses were disposed of by dumping at an approved hazardous dump site, incineration, rendering or composting on farm; or on farm burial where allowed by the Environmental Affairs Department. Eggs are either taken under veterinary supervision for pasteurisation or moved after double fumigation or fogging.

Passive and active six-monthly surveillance in the country is ongoing. Listed NAI free compartments are continuing with the monthly surveillance. In terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No 35 of 1984) any suspect or confirmed outbreak of any avian influenza strain must be immediately reported to the responsible state veterinarian for immediate investigation.

If HPAI is suspected/detected in poultry, there is no scientific justification in placing a radius around the affected farms as a controlled/protection zone due to the mode of transmission, primarily by wild birds. However, all neighbouring farms are immediately visited, and all epidemiologically linked properties to an affected farm are immediately placed under quarantine until preliminary investigations can be conducted.

The recovery of country HPAI freedom may require additional surveillance over and above the current passive and active surveillance.

2.1 Overview of the new HPAI H5 event

In view of the sequencing data that became available in April 2023, indicating an introduction of a new strain of HPAI H5N1 in November 2022 in the Free State Province, it was decided to report any future HPAI H5 outbreaks as new events with the WOA.

2.1.1 Overview of the new HPAI H5 poultry event

The last reported outbreak of HPAI H5 in commercial chickens in the Western Cape Province was during January 2022, while the last reported in the country was during September 2022. The index case of the new HPAI H5 poultry event has a start date of 18 April 2023 and was detected in poultry layers in the Swartland Local Municipality within the Western Cape Province. A total of five (n=5) outbreaks were reported to WOA as part of the new HPAI H5 poultry event. The affected local municipalities in the Western Cape Province are represented in Table 1 below.

Two commercial chicken facilities tested positive for avian influenza matrix gene on PCR – one in the Western Cape Province and one in the Northwest Province. We are waiting further diagnostics.

Province	Local Municipality with total number of outbreaks within this Local Municipality	Details of outbreak
Western Cape <i>0 out of 5 outbreaks resolved</i>	City of Cape Town (n=2)	Commercial chicken layer farm
		Commercial chicken layer farm
	Drakenstein (n=2)	Commercial chicken layer farm
		Commercial chicken layer farm
Swartland (n=1)	Commercial chicken layer farm	

TABLE 1: AFFECTED LOCAL MUNICIPALITY PER PROVINCE FOR HPAI H5

2.1.2 Spatial distribution of the new HPAI H5 poultry event

The spatial distribution of the reported HPAI H5 outbreaks in poultry is represented in Figure 1 below.

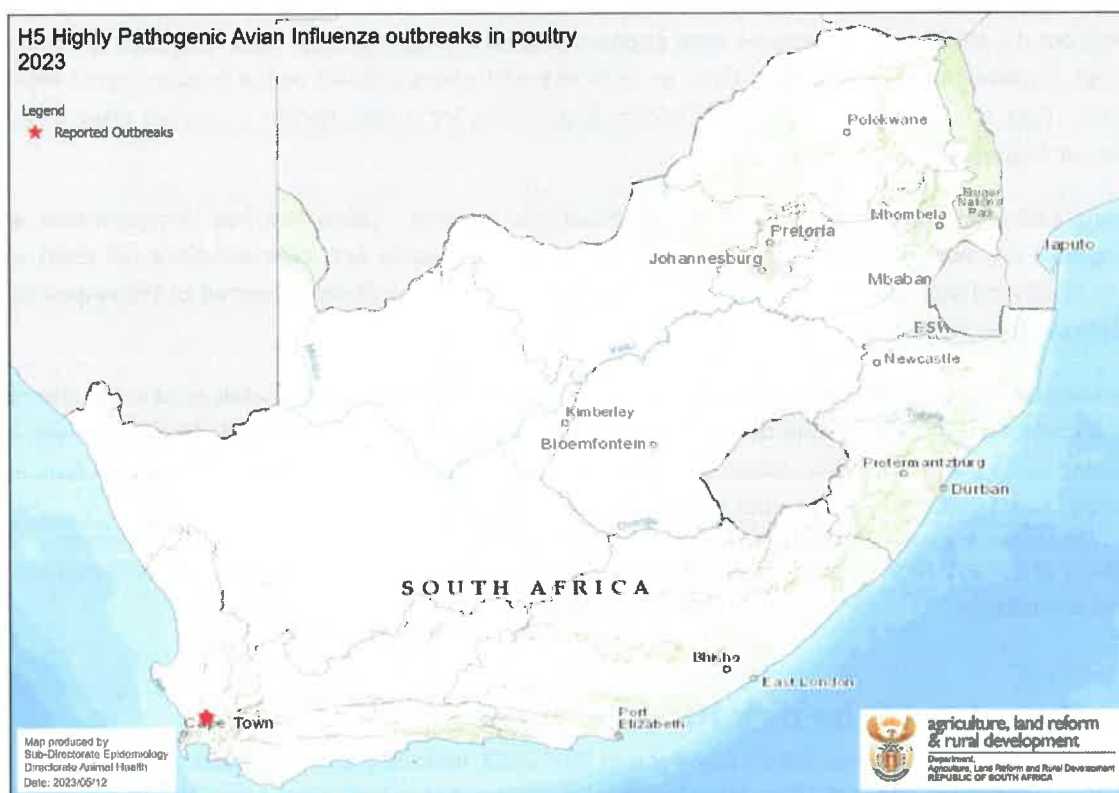


FIGURE 1: SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF HPAI H5 OUTBREAKS IN POULTRY

2.1.3 Overview of the new HPAI H5 non-poultry (wild bird) event

A new wave of H5 avian influenza introductions seems to have started in March 2023. Fifteen outbreaks (n=15) were reported to WOA as part of the start of this new HPAI H5 event. Shorebirds from five more locations in the Western Cape Province tested H5 PCR positive and we are awaiting pathotyping, N typing and sequencing.

Five (n=5) of these outbreaks are in the Western Cape Province. HPAI in wild birds in the Western Cape Province was last detected in November 2022. End of March 2023, samples were collected from shorebirds that were suspected to have HPAI or died and these samples tested positive for avian influenza. These samples originated from shorebirds from Strand Beach and Blouberg Beach in the City of Cape Town Local Municipality. The sample from Blouberg Beach tested suspect positive for HPAI H5 on PCR and the sample from Strand Beach tested positive for HPAI H5 on PCR. Samples collected beginning of May 2023 from shorebirds at Hout Bay and Simon's Town also in the City of Cape Town Local Municipality tested positive for HPAI H5. Further diagnostics to

determine the N type and sequencing are underway. Samples collected from Egyptian geese at a Nature Reserve in the Langeberg Local Municipality also tested HPAI H5 PCR positive.

Ten (n=10) of these outbreaks were from environmental wild bird surveillance samples that tested H5 PCR positive. Sequencing is underway. These nine outbreaks are in the City of Tshwane Local Municipality in Gauteng Province (n=6); the Chief Albert Luthuli Local Municipality in Mpumalanga Province (n=1); and the Msunduzi, Mkhambathini and Richmond Local Municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal Province (n=3).

2.1.4 Spatial distribution of the new HPAI H5 non-poultry (wild bird) event

The spatial distribution of the reported HPAI H5 outbreaks in non-poultry is represented in Figure 2 below.

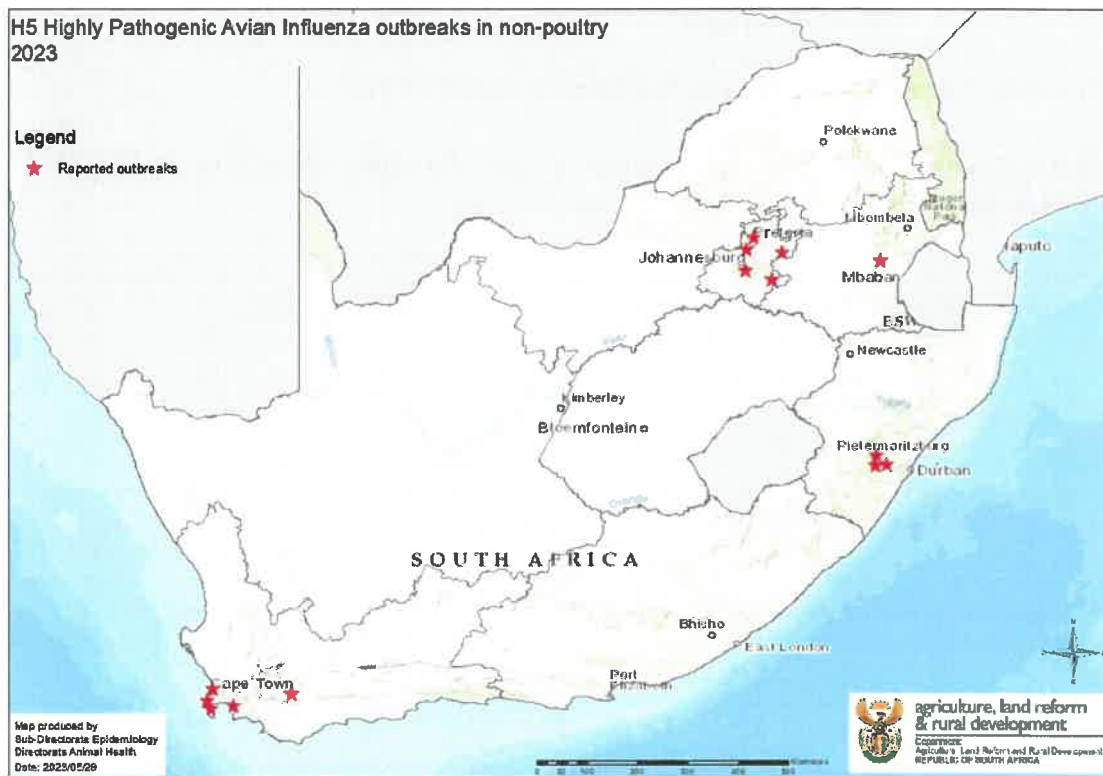


FIGURE 2: SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF HPAI H5 OUTBREAKS IN NON-POULTRY

2.1.5 Temporal distribution of the new HPAI H5 event

The temporal distribution per category (commercial chickens; small scale farmers/speculators; backyard poultry; commercial ostriches; and wild birds/hobbyists/zoos) per week since the start of the HPAI H5 events is represented in Figure 3 below.

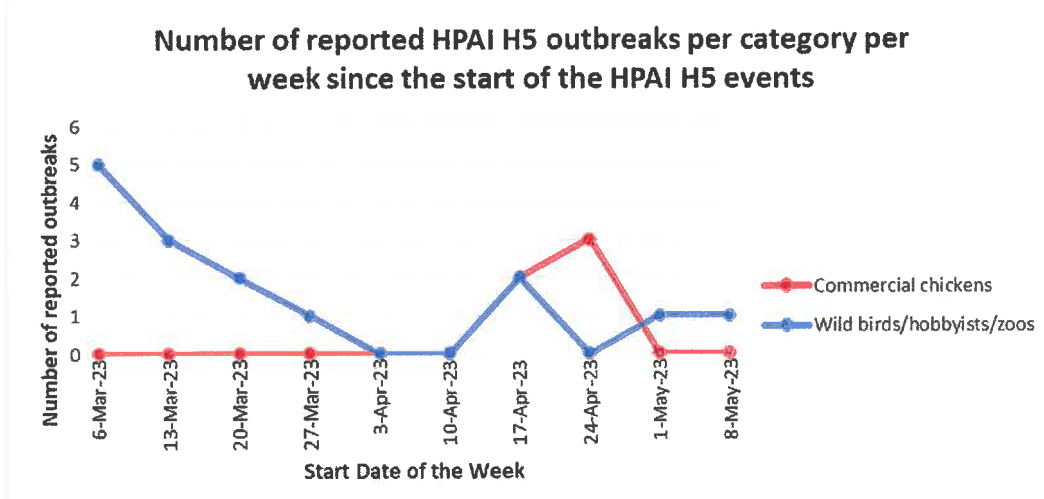


FIGURE 3: TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION OF HPAI H5 OUTBREAKS PER CATEGORY PER WEEK

The temporal distribution of the HPAI H5 event in poultry is depicted in Figure 4 below, while the temporal distribution of the event in non-poultry is depicted in Figure 5 below.

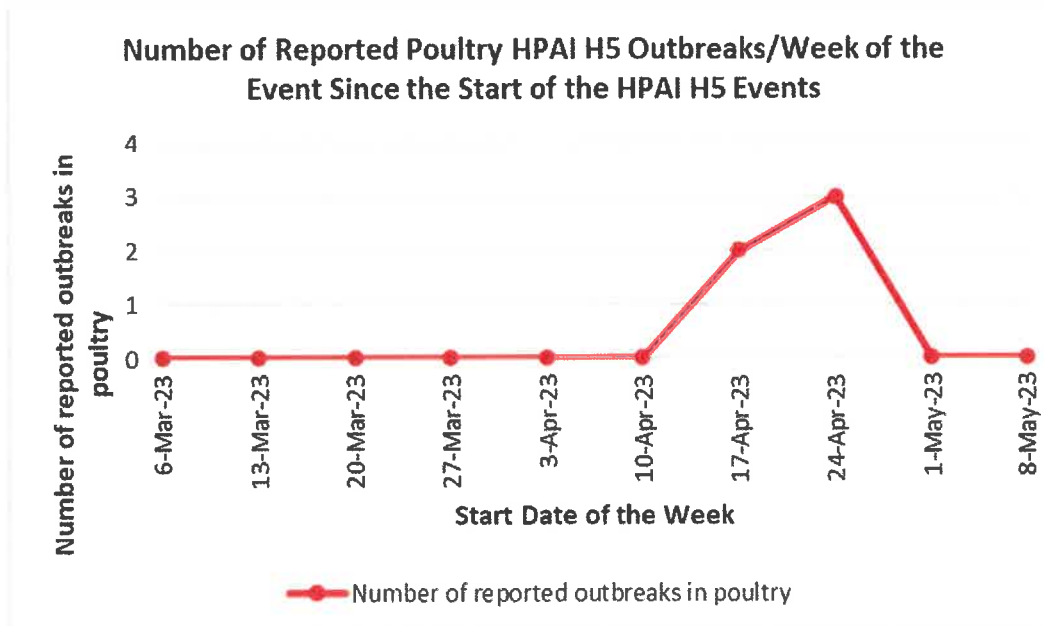


FIGURE 4: TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION OF HPAI H5 EVENT IN POULTRY

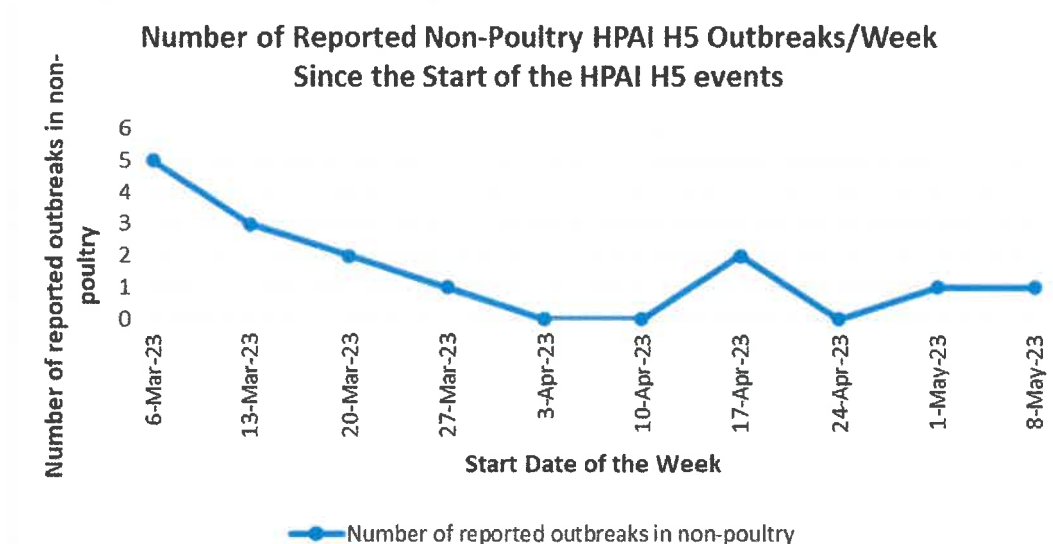


FIGURE 5: TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION OF HPAI H5 EVENT IN NON-POULTRY

3. Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI)

In accordance with Chapter 1.3 of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, the “low pathogenic avian influenza (poultry)” disease code has been delisted. As of 1 January 2022 LPAI is only being reported to the WOA as part of a country’s six monthly surveillance.

Environmental wild bird surveillance samples that tested positive for LPAI H5 on PCR include: two locations in Gauteng Province during March 2023 and three locations during April 2023 in the Western Cape Province.

All LPAI strains however remain controlled animal diseases in terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No 35 of 1984) and control measures and reporting will remain unaltered until reviewed.

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 Date: 2023-05-30

