



11 January 2008

Update: Confirmed H5N1 avian influenza in wild swans in Dorset

The Health Protection Agency is continuing its response to the confirmation of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 in swans from the Chesil Beach area of Dorset.

This involves close cooperation with colleagues from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the NHS and other local and national agencies.

As a routine approach to H5N1 incidents, a local health protection team has been working to identify any at risk individuals who had close contact with implicated birds.

As a result of investigations on site, the HPA has identified a group of 12 individuals for monitoring and follow-up. Further epidemiological work, on the basis of the nature and timing of the close contact has enabled HPA staff to identify a smaller group for preventative medication. Seven people have received antiviral medication, and six will have the seasonal influenza vaccine. No individuals have any relevant symptoms of illness.

Although the risk to people potentially exposed is very small, antiviral medication is given as a precautionary measure to further reduce the risk of them becoming ill.

Seasonal influenza vaccination is provided to minimise the theoretical risk of an avian influenza virus mixing with a seasonal influenza virus and mutating into a new strain, which could potentially spread easily among people, and have the capability to prompt a pandemic of influenza.

This action is being taken with individual people who have been in close contact with the implicated birds. The current level of risk to humans from avian flu is extremely low and there is no need for local residents to restrict or change their everyday activity.