

Avian Influenza: H5 and H7 outbreak update report

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agriculture

Department:

Agriculture

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Report compiled by:
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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. Avian influenza viruses, including H5 and H7 subtypes, may be classified according to their pathogenicity in poultry as low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) or 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. 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 WOAHP Terrestrial Animal Health Code), to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) does 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 is conducted across the country to detect any incursion of avian influenza. Passive and active surveillance in backyard and commercial chickens is continuing across the country.

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. HPAI H5N2 was detected in October 2022 in chickens of a small-scale poultry facility in KwaZulu-Natal Province. This is the first ever HPAI H5N2 in chickens in the country. HPAI H5N2 was detected in ostriches during 2004, 2006 and 2011.

In 2023, South Africa experienced outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 affecting both poultry and wild birds. Sequencing data confirmed that the strain was introduced in late 2022, and new events were reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). The poultry event began on 18 April 2023 in the Western Cape and spread to five other provinces, resulting in 29 reported outbreaks, while the wild bird event, which started in March 2023, accounted for 44 outbreaks across six provinces. All cases in poultry and wild birds have since been resolved, and both events have been officially closed with WOAH.

In the same year, 2023, South Africa also experienced its first HPAI H7N6 outbreak event, affecting poultry and backyard chicken flocks. The virus was initially detected in chickens from samples collected in early June 2023, with subsequent detections in non-commercial backyard flocks from September 2023. Molecular characterisation confirmed a highly pathogenic H7 virus, with the neuraminidase identified as N6 and genetic similarity to H7N6 viruses previously detected in Egypt and Georgia. A total of 116 outbreaks were reported across eight provinces, with the majority occurring in Gauteng Province. All HPAI H7N6 outbreaks were subsequently resolved, and the event was officially closed with the World Organisation for Animal Health on 01 September 2025.

The recent H5 avian influenza outbreaks within the country are summarised in this report and are categorised according to pathogenicity (HPAI, LPAI or undefined).

2. Highly pathogenic avian influenza control in South Africa

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 backward and forward tracing is implemented to detect any possible spread of disease. Most affected properties were depopulated and carcasses disposed of by dumping at an approved hazardous waste disposal site, incineration, rendering or composting on farm; or on farm burial was allowed by the Environmental Affairs Department. Eggs are either taken under veterinary supervision for pasteurisation or moved after double fumigation or fogging.

National passive surveillance and six-monthly active surveillance are ongoing. Listed NAI-free compartments continue to conduct monthly surveillance. Listed NAI-free compartments continue to conduct 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 limited scientific justification for establishing fixed radius control zones 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.

3. HPAI H5N1 event 2025 - 2026

The 2025–2026 HPAI H5N1 event commenced with samples collected on 23 June 2025. The first H5 PCR-positive result was confirmed on 25 June 2025 in a commercial poultry flock in Mpumalanga Province.

3.1 HPAI H5 event in poultry

A total of twelve (n=12) outbreaks were reported. Three (n=3) of these outbreaks were in Mpumalanga Province; two (n=2) in North-West Province, six (n=6) in the Western Cape Province and one (n=1) in the Eastern Cape Province.

3.1.1 Spatial distribution of the H5 event in poultry

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

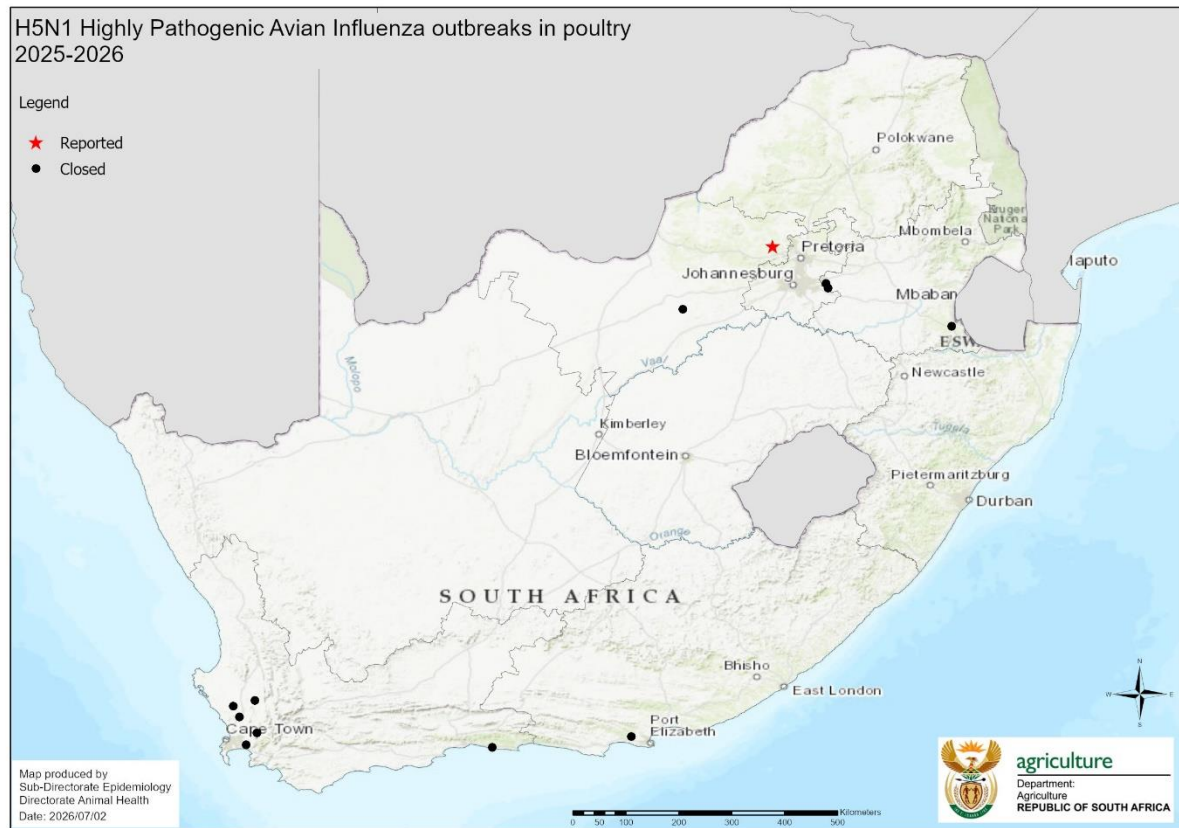


Figure 1: SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF HPAI H5 OUTBREAKS IN POULTRY (2025 – 2026)

Eleven (n=11) of the HPAI H5 outbreaks were resolved. Six (n=6) of these outbreaks were in the Western Cape, three (n=3) were in Mpumalanga, one (n=1) was in the Eastern Cape and one (n=1) was in the North-West.

The one unresolved outbreak (n=1), by local municipality, is presented in Table 1 below.

Province & Local Municipality	Local per Province	Number of Unresolved HPAI H5 poultry outbreaks
01 NORTH-WEST		1
472 Madibeng		1
Grand Total		1

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF UNRESOLVED OUTBREAKS PER LOCAL MUNICIPALITY PER PROVINCE FOR HPAI H5 IN POULTRY

3.1.2 Temporal distribution of the H5 event in poultry

The temporal distribution of the HPAI H5 event in poultry is in Figure 2 below.

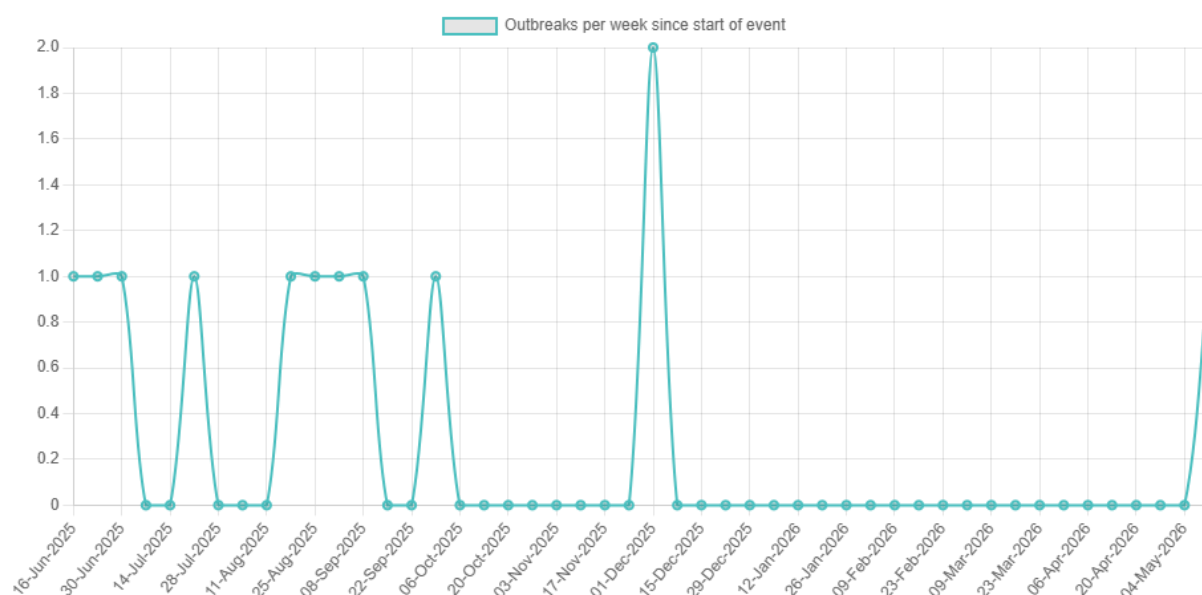


FIGURE 2: TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION OF HPAI H5 EVENT IN POULTRY (2025 – 2026)

3.2 HPAI H5 in non-poultry (wild birds, backyard poultry and mammals) 2025 – 2026

Detections of H5 avian influenza in non-poultry commenced on 01 May 2025. Fifty-four (n=54) outbreaks were reported to WOAHA as part of this HPAI H5 event in wild birds, backyard poultry and mammals. These outbreaks are distributed as follows:

Forty-four (n=44) cases were detected in **wild birds**, thirty-eight (n=38) cases in the Western Cape Province, four (n=4) cases in Eastern Cape Province, one (n=1) in Gauteng Province and one (n=1) in Limpopo Province. Two (n=2) cases were detected in **backyard poultry (domestic geese)** in the Western Cape Province. Seven (n=7) cases were detected in **backyard chickens**, one (n=1) in Mpumalanga Province and six (n=6) in the Western Cape Province. One (n=1) case was detected in a **mammal (Cape Fur Seal)** in the Western Cape Province.

3.2.1 Spatial distribution of the H5 event in non-poultry

The spatial distribution of the reported HPAI H5 outbreaks in non-poultry is represented in Figure 3 below.

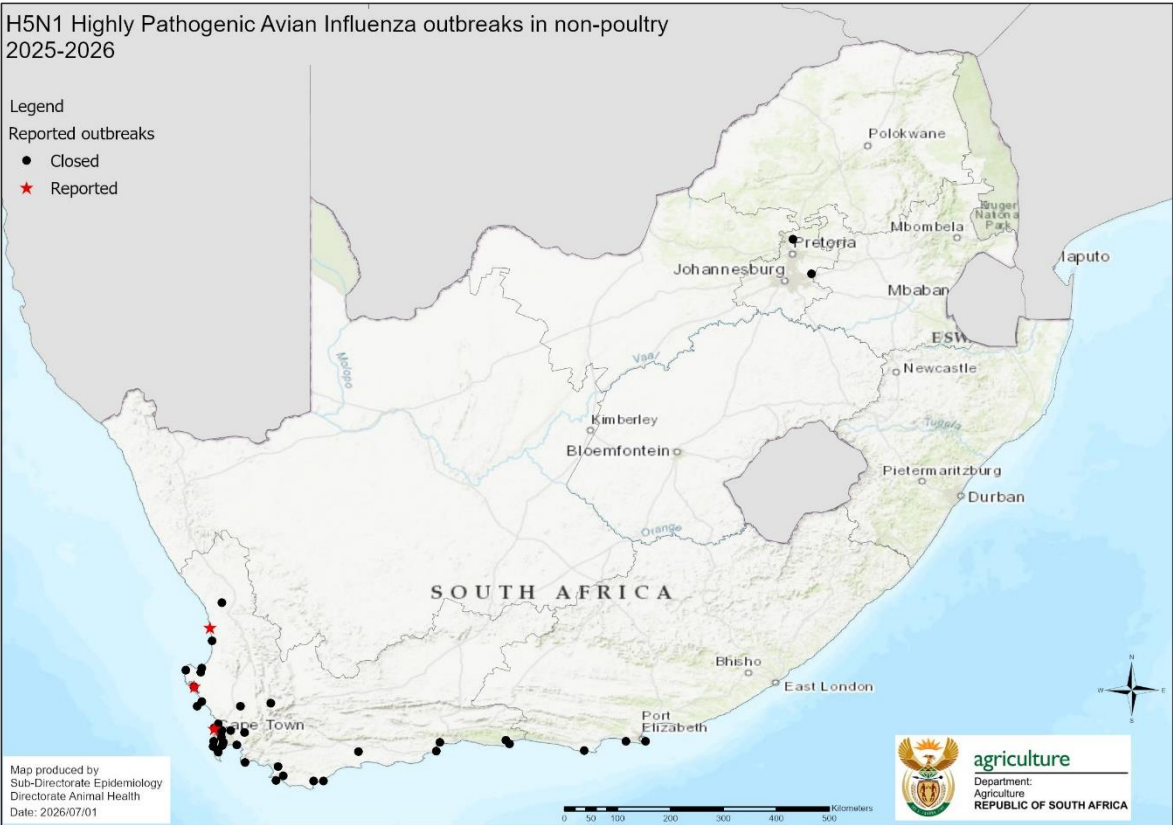


Figure 3: SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF HPAI H5 OUTBREAKS IN NON-POULTRY (2025 – 2026)

3.2.2 Temporal distribution of the H5 event in non-poultry

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

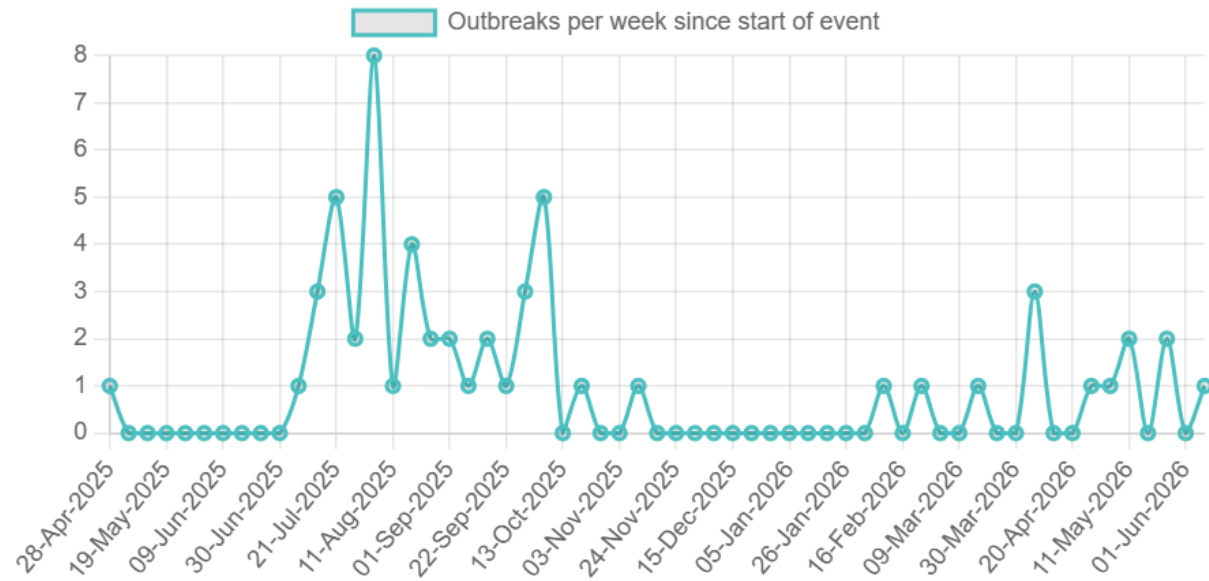


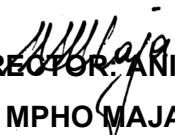
FIGURE 4: TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION OF HPAI H5 EVENT IN NON-POULTRY (2025 - 2026)

4. Low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI)

In accordance with Chapter 1.3 of the WOAHP 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 WOAHP as part of a country’s six-monthly surveillance.

All LPAI strains, however, are still 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.

H5 avian influenza virus was detected by PCR in ostriches on farms located mainly in the Hessequa and Oudtshoorn local municipalities, sequencing indicated a H5N1 low pathogenic avian influenza virus.


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