



Code of Practice in Relation to Avian Influenza for Breeding and Rearing of Game Birds intended for Release or for Export

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Additional information on avian influenza may be found on the Department of Agriculture website at: www.agriculture.gov.ie

1. Background

- 1.1 Over the coming months, many thousands of game birds will be reared in Ireland that are intended for release in order to restock supplies of wild game. Many of these birds will be imported from the UK or France as day old chicks with smaller numbers from Belgium and the US. The remainder are hatched from breeding stock in Ireland. A proportion of the birds will be released within Ireland and the remaining birds will be exported mainly to the UK as 7 week old pheasant poults or 6 week old mallards.
- 1.2 It has long been known that wild birds – in particular wild waterfowl – are a reservoir for avian influenza viruses. It had been thought that these viruses were generally low pathogenic strains of little significance to either wild bird populations or domestic poultry. However this view has changed since the emergence of the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain in Asia in 2003. This H5N1 has given cause for concern because it produces severe disease in poultry, and also in rare cases, in humans. Since 2005, it has also been found that this virus may be carried over long distances by migratory waterfowl.
- 1.3 The discovery of HPAI of the Asian lineage (H5N1) in the EU in 2006 has meant that measures were required to prevent the spread of this disease through the movement of game birds between Member States. Game birds (especially ducks and geese) are thought to be a particular risk, due to the traditional rearing systems that lead to contact with wild waterfowl, and to the fact that signs of disease are not always obvious in these species. To that end the European Commission has introduced specific measures for game birds, requiring enhanced biosecurity and testing of flocks for certain types of avian influenza prior to export. These measures apply to both imported and exported birds.
- 1.4 There is currently no evidence of HPAI H5N1 in game bird farms in the EU. However, should the virus be found in these regions, EU law would ban trade in live birds from the affected regions and the extent and duration of the ban would depend on the circumstances and a risk assessment.
- 1.5 There is evidence, however, of low pathogenic strains of both H5 and H7 subtypes of avian influenza in wild birds in the EU and US. Whilst these strains have no significance for human health, there is concern that if they are introduced into poultry that are densely stocked, they will have an increased opportunity to convert into highly pathogenic strains that can cause severe disease.

2. Legal basis

- 2.1 Commission Decision 2006/605/EC of September 6, 2006 on “*certain protection measures in relation to intra-Community trade in poultry intended for restocking supplies of wild game.*”
- 2.2 Hereafter the “poultry intended for restocking supplies of wild game” will be referred to as “game birds”. Game birds in the Irish context include **mallards, pheasants, quail and partridge**.

- 2.3 For the purposes of trade and disease control, the EU regards game birds as “poultry” while confined for breeding and rearing, but are “wild birds” once released for hunting purposes.
- 2.4 This decision provides for:
- Biosecurity measures to be applied on holdings keeping game birds; and
 - Surveillance measures to be applied when productive game birds (i.e. birds \geq 72 hours old) are exported to other member states or third countries.
 - Certification of compliance with biosecurity measures and avian influenza testing for export.
- 2.5 It is incumbent on the competent authority (DAF) to develop guidelines for good biosecurity practice for such holdings taking Commission Decision 2005/734/EC into account. The measures recommended by DAF are outlined below and also in the Information Booklet for registered poultry flock owners, that was issued in February 2006.
- 2.6 The conditions under which DAF may authorise the dispatch (export) of game birds to other member states or third countries are described in Article 4 of 2006/605/EC. Game birds are separated into two categories on age:
- birds 72 hours old and older
 - birds less than one month old.

A. Birds \geq 72 hours

Dispatch can only be authorised if the farm or holding was:

- Inspected by DAF and found to be in compliance with the biosecurity recommendations (as detailed below).
- During the 2 months prior to dispatch either of the following was carried out:
 - The farm was included in ongoing official surveillance for avian influenza as per Directive 2005/94/EC (which is not the case for any game farm in Ireland); or
 - A random blood sampling for avian influenza serology (subtypes H5 and H7 only), with negative results, was carried out on the flock of origin. If the birds are ducks, 50 samples are required while 20 samples are required from other game such as pheasants, quail or partridge. The birds sampled should be at least 4 weeks old at the time of sampling and be representative of the birds for the consignment.

B. Birds < 1 month old

Dispatch can only be authorised if the following applies:

- The holding/farm is inspected by DAF and found to be in compliance with the biosecurity recommendations (as detailed below).
- Virological investigation for avian influenza is carried out on 20 throat swabs and 20 vent swabs from birds intended for dispatch during the week prior to their intended date of export.

C. Health inspection

Prior to dispatch, a health inspection of the farm or holding must be conducted by DAF during the 24 hours prior to dispatch (in accordance with Article 10 of Council Directive 90/539/EEC). In order to pass this inspection, the birds must

have been held on the farm or holding since hatching or for at least 21 days; the holding must not be subject to any animal health restrictions applicable to poultry; and the flock must be free of clinical signs or suspicion of disease.

D. Certification

The health certificate accompanying birds approved for dispatch will include the following statement “*This consignment complies with the animal health conditions laid down in Commission Decision 2006/605/EC*”.

3. Requirements for game bird keepers

3.1 Legal requirements that must be complied with when importing stock:

- a) Notify local DVO at least one working day before a consignment is due to arrive in Ireland.
- b) Make sure that the imported birds are accompanied by a health certificate issued by the competent authority of the country of origin (e.g. DEFRA if birds are from the UK).
- c) Check that the certificate details match the details of the consignment and if not, contact the DVO immediately.
- d) Ensure that the flock is registered with DAF.
- e) Keep records of consignments of birds entering or leaving the holding.
- f) Report any suspicion of disease in the flock.

3.2 Management strategies to reduce the risk of introducing disease:

- a) Consider how avian influenza may enter the holding in order to help prevent this happening.
- b) Infection may be carried onto the farm by infected wild birds defecating on the premises. The virus is generally shed in the faeces of waterfowl and can spread to birds on the premises by contaminated ponds, soil, mud, feed, or water sources. Under Irish climatic conditions the virus may persist for several weeks in contaminated mud or ponds. Carcasses of dead birds are also a risk.
- c) The second way the virus may gain entry is through bought in stock or contaminated equipment such as crates, vehicles, or clothing.
- d) Ensure **good biosecurity practices** on the premises by observing the following guide points:
 - i. Have a good **perimeter fence** around the site with a single entrance/exit and a lockable gate. Small flocks should also be fenced in.
 - ii. Pens should be wild bird and rodent-proof, and always keep the **doors closed**. Wild waterfowl and sea gulls are a particular risk. Bird-proof netting above outdoor pens for mallards and pheasants should have apertures no larger than 100mm to discourage entry by wild birds.

- iii. Separate **ducks and geese** from other poultry (pheasants, quail, partridge). If the holding has more than one type of poultry, ensure that these are housed in separate areas and managed as separate biosecure units.
- iv. Feed and water birds indoors where possible. Always clean up feed spills immediately after they have occurred.
- v. Prevent poultry from having **access to lakes or rivers** used by wild or migratory waterfowl by fencing off these areas. Ponds used for mallards should be fenced off and netted over to exclude wild waterfowl.
- vi. Only allow essential **visitors** to have access to the poultry site, and provide farm or disposable overalls and footwear for visitors and staff. Provide hand-washing facilities, and insist that these are used by staff and visitors.
- vii. Provide **footbaths** containing approved disinfectant (see DAF web site) outside each pen. Ensure that the disinfectant is used at the recommended dilution rate, and change the disinfectant at least twice weekly.
- viii. Only allow essential **vehicles** onto the site. Staff, service vehicles etc. should be parked outside the perimeter. Insist that all vehicles that have to enter the site have been cleaned and disinfected beforehand.
- ix. Operate an **all-in/all-out** policy when stocking houses/pens, and only buy replacement birds from reputable sources.
- x. Older birds are a greater risk, so whenever possible import eggs or day old chicks rather than older birds.
- xi. Seek assurances from the supplier that flocks of origin are biosecure and have shown no signs of disease.
- xii. If eggs are imported, check that the hatchery hygiene is good and that any drop in hatchability is investigated.
- xiii. Game birds should not be recaptured from the free-living state for breeding purposes. This is a high-risk practice because free-living birds may have come in contact with migratory birds carrying avian influenza. Thus, infection may be introduced into your flock.
- xiv. Only allow **equipment** that has been cleaned and disinfected into poultry houses or hatchery. Always store equipment in a bird and rodent-proof location following disinfection.
- xv. Always store **bedding** (such as shavings) in a bird and rodent-proof location. Do not allow **pet animals** (particularly cats and dogs) into stores or poultry houses.
- xvi. Keep birds isolated for at least 21 days after import or hatching.

- xvii. Store **dead birds** in a lidded container. All dead birds should be disposed of in accordance with the Animal By-Products Regulations (EC1774/2002). Thus, commercial producers should use the private collection services available throughout the country provided there is no suspicion that the birds died from avian influenza. Carcasses may also be taken directly to an approved rendering plant or licensed knackery. Contact your local DVO for advice specific to your area.
- xviii. Consult your vet or DAF if mortality rate is higher than expected or if birds show signs of sickness.

4. Specific requirements for producers of poultry for restocking supplies of game birds

4.1 Farms not exporting birds to another member state or third country

- a) Are obliged to comply with good biosecurity measures as detailed above and also in the information booklet for registered poultry flock owners.
- b) There are no requirements for testing birds for avian influenza if they are destined for release within Ireland only.

4.2 Farms exporting birds older than 72 hours:

- a) This applies to holdings exporting mallards or pheasants to other Member States of the European Community, such as the UK (including Northern Ireland).
- b) These premises must also comply with biosecurity measures on the farm as detailed above and in the information booklet for flock owners. Specific biosecurity issues that should be addressed are:
 - Rearing pens should be covered by netting to exclude wild birds.
 - Released mallards and pheasants should not be recaptured to use as breeding stock. Between release and recapture they are essentially wild birds and are free to mix with wild migratory waterfowl or other wild birds and may become infected with avian influenza.

5. Testing birds for avian influenza prior to export.

5.1 Requirements for flock owner/manager:

- a) Inform the local DAF DVO of the rearing schedule and planned consignment dates at the earliest possible opportunity in the season so that sampling dates can be scheduled to comply with legal requirements and to minimize disruption of your business.

- b) Select birds from each consignment for blood sampling (50 ducks or 20 of other game birds). These should:
 - Be representative of the consignment for export
 - Be at least 4 weeks old
 - Sampled at least a week before expected date of export.
- c) Contact DVO to carry out sampling.

5.2 Role and responsibility of DAF:

- a) Plan a sampling protocol to suit the husbandry and management of the farm in question in consultation with the flock manager.
- b) Collect clotted blood samples from selected birds.
- c) Send the samples to the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory, Backweston for testing. Samples will be tested using a haemagglutination inhibition (HAI) test specific for H5 and H7 subtypes of avian influenza (Chapter VIII, of the Diagnostic Manual for Avian Influenza, Commission Decision 2006/437/EC).
- d) Conduct a clinical examination on site within 24 hours of consignment date.
- e) If laboratory test results are negative (i.e. no avian influenza antibodies in the blood), and the clinic examination is favourable, issue a health certificate to accompany the assignment. The certificate shall state *“This shipment complies with the animal health conditions laid down in Commission Decision 2006/605/EC”*.

6. What happens if the test results are positive?

- 6.1 If the test results are positive (H5 or H7 antibody present), or the clinical examination finds evidence of disease, **further tests** will have to be carried out to determine whether avian influenza virus is present in the flock. Samples (dead birds or swabs from live birds) will be collected for virus isolation.
- 6.2 Virus isolation is conducted on samples from throat and vent swabs or tissues from whole carcasses. Tests are conducted as per the Avian Influenza Diagnostic Manual.
- 6.3 Negative result: If no AI virus is isolated, the shipment can be authorised. The certificate shall state *“This shipment complies with the animal health conditions laid down in Commission Decision 2006/605/EC”*

NB. Negative results take longer to complete than positive results. Up to two weeks may be required for a final result.

- 6.4 Positive result: Isolation of H5 or H7 positive **Low Pathogenic AI (LPAI)** will require implementation of control measures (Council Directive 2005/94/EC):
 - a) The shipment would not proceed and a 1 km restriction zone will be applied around the holding.
 - b) All poultry and captive birds on the holding would be **culled** either on site or at a designated slaughterhouse.
 - c) Before culling no poultry may enter or leave the holding.
 - d) All carcasses and hatching eggs must be disposed of under DAF supervision.

- e) Any materials likely to be contaminated by LPAI (such as manure or bedding) shall be treated or disposed of under DAF supervision.
- f) Domestic mammals that may have contact with poultry on the holding will also be restricted from entering or leaving the holding.
- g) Bird gatherings such as fairs, shows or markets will be prohibited in the restricted zone.
- h) Release of game birds will be prohibited in the restricted zone.
- i) These measures will be enforced for at least 21 days following cleaning and disinfection of the infected holding and until DAF consider that the risk of spread of LPAI is negligible.

6.5 Isolation of **Highly Pathogenic AI (HPAI)** will require implementation of control measures as laid down in Council Directive 2005/94/EC (and Commission Decision 2006/415/EC in the event of the H5N1 subtype):

- a) The shipment would not proceed.
- b) Restrictions around the holding would be put in place.
- c) A Protection Zone of 3km radius around the infected holding and a Surveillance Zone of 10km radius would be established. A Further Restricted Zone would be required in case of H5N1.
- d) Movement of all poultry and poultry products on or off the infected holding would be prohibited.
- e) All poultry and other captive birds on the infected holding must be **culled** under DAF supervision.
- f) All carcasses, eggs and other contaminated materials must be disposed of or treated under DAF supervision.
- g) Other captive birds or mammals (except house pets) may not enter or leave the infected holding.
- h) Bird gatherings such as fairs, shows or markets will be prohibited in the Protection and Surveillance Zones
- i) Release of game birds will be prohibited in the Protection and Surveillance Zones
- j) Measures in the Protection Zone will be enforced for at least 21 days following cleaning and disinfection on the infected holding and until all holdings in the zone have been tested in accordance with the diagnostic manual.
- k) Measures applied in the Surveillance zone will be enforced for 30 days following cleaning and disinfection on the infected holding.

7. Compensation

For poultry culled under the above legislation to control the spread of LPAI or HPAI, farmers will be compensated for the value of the flock based on class of birds, their age at the time of culling, and feed consumed to that date. Consequential costs are not covered.

8. Importation of birds intended for restocking supplies of wild game.

This includes the importation of day old chicks, breeding stock, or birds for release on shoots, from other member states of the EU and third countries. The requirements for importation are laid down in Council Directive 90/539/EEC, Commission Decision 2006/605/EC and Commission Decision 2006/696/EC.

8.1 Importation of birds or hatching eggs from other Member States.

A. Birds less than one month old may be imported under licence issued by DAF provided that:

- i. That they originate on a holding that has been inspected by the competent authority in the MS of origin and found to comply with the guidelines for good biosecurity practice.
- ii. During the 2 months prior to dispatch the premises of origin is included in an official surveillance programme for avian influenza, or a random sample of the birds from the consignment was tested negative for avian influenza H5 or H7 antibodies. The sample size should be 50 if the birds are ducks, or 20 individuals if the birds are other game birds (pheasants, partridge).
- iii. During the week prior to dispatch, a sample of 20 birds are swabbed (throat and vent) and tested for avian influenza virus by PCR (genetic test) or virus isolation and found to be negative.
- iv. A clinical examination is conducted 24 hours before dispatch.
- v. The consignment is accompanied by a Health Certificate from the MS of origin stating “*This consignment complies with the animal health conditions laid down in Commission Decision 2006/605/EC.*”

B. Birds over 72 hours old intended for use as breeding stock or for release on shoots may only be imported under licence provided that conditions 8.1.a.i, ii, iv and v above are fulfilled. This implies that birds to be released on shoots must have originated as captive birds on a named and inspected holding.

C. Birds that were released on shoots in another Member State and later recaptured are regarded as wild birds (Commission Decision 2006/605/EC). These recaptured birds cannot be certified as poultry reared for restocking supplies of wild game. Thus, a licence for importation will not be issued.

8.2 Importation of birds or hatching eggs from Third Countries.

- a) Birds covered by Council Directive 90/539/EEC and Commission Decision 2006/696/EC include game birds such as ducks, quail, partridge and pheasants. The categories of birds include hatching eggs, day old chicks (less than 72 hrs old), breeding stock over 72 hrs old, and birds older than 72 hrs for restocking supplies of wild game. Game birds are normally imported as day olds.
- b) Such birds may only be imported under licence if:
 - i. The countries that are on the following approved list: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Croatia (some regions), Israel, New Zealand, USA.
 - ii. The country of origin is not covered by an import ban.

- iii. The consignment is covered by a Veterinary Certificate from the competent authority in the country of origin.
- iv. The premises of origin are approved by the competent authority in that country and the conditions for approval are at least as strict as those used within the EU.
- v. Day old chicks must be transported in boxes that contain a single species of poultry and the box labelled with the country of origin, the species of poultry, the hatchery number, and the consignors name and business address.
- vi. Breeding or productive birds must be held in quarantine on the holding of destination in Ireland following importation for a period of 6 weeks. The period may be reduced to 3 weeks following favourable Newcastle Disease and Avian Influenza test results. The testing procedure is as follows:
- vii. Between 7 and 15 days following importation vent swabs are collected from all birds if the consignment is less than 60 and from 60 birds if the consignment is larger.
- viii. The testing is conducted in a DAF approved laboratory.
- ix. During the quarantine period, the birds must be held in poultry houses or pens in isolation from other birds. If introduced into houses or pens containing other breeding and productive birds or day old chicks, all birds in the house or pen are then under quarantine.
- x. Hatching eggs must also be kept separate in incubators and hatching and the chicks reared in isolation from others for a period of 3 weeks from the date of hatching. If they are placed where other hatching eggs are already present, then the period of quarantine starts at the time of introduction of the last imported eggs and applies to all in contact stock.
- xi. Prior to the date of expiry of the quarantine period, imported birds or the chicks from imported hatching eggs, must receive a clinical examination from an authorized veterinarian and samples taken for laboratory testing where necessary.