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CDQAP Advisory: HPAI Suspected in California Dairy Cattle

August 29, 2024

With preliminary testing revealing HPAI H5N1 on California dairies, producers are asking what they should do to protect their herds from “Bird Flu”. The information below was developed with the assistance of CDFA and other national experts. Updates will follow.

The Current Situation

- CDFA is awaiting USDA confirmatory testing and sequence analysis of samples from 3 Central Valley dairies which were preliminarily positive for HPAI. USDA will likely make those final results public next week. Investigation of how these herds became infected is on-going, but cows were moved between them before clinical signs were recognized. These farms are under CDFA Quarantine and CDFA is working with the dairies and their veterinarians to limit further spread. What to expect if your facility becomes a suspect herd can be found in this CDFA [infographic](#). The most current HPAI information can be found at CDFA’s HPAI homepage [here](#).
- In preparation for media requests, CMAB has proactively developed communication message points. See attached. Producer, processor or trade organizations can forward media inquiries to CDFA, CMAB or CDQAP. A central message: *Exhaustive research has conclusively demonstrated that pasteurization inactivates potential pathogens, including the HPAI virus.*
- Biosecurity remains producers’ most effective defense. Ideally producers have already established a comprehensive biosecurity program based on [state](#) or [federal](#) programs. [Financial assistance](#) is available for producers. For producers without a comprehensive plan, don’t panic. Below we’ve listed effective measures you can implement immediately.

Protecting Your Herd: 10 Action Items

By far the most important precautions producers can take are ones that can be implemented unilaterally and immediately:

- **Isolate new arrivals for 30 days.** If it’s not possible to close your herd, the best protection is rigid adherence to a 30-day isolation period for new or returning cattle. Isolation paired with pre-movement testing offers the greatest protection. CDFA offers free voluntary [testing](#) demonstrating either your herd, or a source herd, is disease free. For more information contact [your local CDFA district office](#). For heifers raised off-site, ensure that springers are either tested before movement and/or returned to the dairy and quarantined 30 days prior to calving.

- **Use an effective isolation location** – In order to be effective, the isolation area will not allow nose-to-nose contact with resident cows and will not share a water source. Such isolation requirements may be difficult to meet on the home dairy and use of an alternative isolation location may be necessary. Isolation should also apply to returning show or fair animals.
- **Power-wash and disinfect trailers.** Almost two thirds of new Michigan dairy infections did not involve transfer of live animals. This suggests that [cleaning and disinfection](#) of shared vehicles, (particularly trailers) both before and after farm entry, is critical. If at all possible, use only your own trailers to transport only your own animals.
- **Avoid sharing employees with other dairy or poultry operations.** Unpublished data suggest that physical virus transfer by people is critically important in disease spread. This makes sharing employees a high-risk practice. A powerful biosecurity practice is for farm employees to use farm-specific boots and coveralls that never leave the dairy. This practice becomes even more important if you can't prevent employees from having outside animal contact.
- **Manage essential facility traffic.** All delivery vehicles (feed, milk tankers, rendering) should use designated paths and parking areas that do not cross farm vehicle paths. Milk tankers require special consideration. See below.
- **Partner with your processor on milk pick-ups.** Infected milk is the primary method of disease spread. Producers should understand what PPE and hygiene practices processors expect from their haulers. Processors may choose to dedicate certain trucks for use only on infected farms. Producers can also have employees clean and disinfect the milk house after milk pick-ups, with special attention to milk spilled during transfer. See page 34 of USDA's Secure Milk Supply (SMS) program's standards for [Raw Milk Collection & Transport](#). The SMS biosecurity standards were developed for use during a Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak, but will also be effective in limiting HPAI spread between dairy farms.
- **Limit or prohibit non-essential farm visitors.** CDFA and CDQAP delivered a webinar on best practices for dairy visitors. See this [article](#) which includes a checklist and a link to the webinar's recording. In addition, work with essential visitors (veterinarians, AI and equipment technicians, hoof trimmers) to develop biosecurity plans tailored to their function.
- **Train employees to report suspicious symptoms.** Early segregation of infected animals into a hospital string can greatly limit within-herd spread and financial losses. Train and empower employees to both follow your farm's biosecurity protocols as well as report suspicious symptoms in cattle. [English](#) and [Spanish](#) training aids for employees are available.
- **Comply with movement requirements.** If importing cattle from outside California is unavoidable, make sure your out-of-state veterinarian has completed a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection ([CVI](#) or "health papers, valid for only 7 days), entry permits and pre-movement testing. See requirements [here](#).
- **Train & equip employees on infected farms.** The California Department of Public Health ([CDPH](#)) has PPE recommendations for farm workers who handle raw milk in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). Disposable gloves and N95 masks, along with non-disposable personal goggles or face shield for each employee will robust protection. At a minimum, producers should empower employees to report illness, particularly with respiratory, cold/flu or eye symptoms, so they may seek medical attention and treatment. Producers should also strongly discourage employee consumption of raw, unpasteurized milk from the farm.

Other Dairy HPAI Resources

CDFA HPAI in Livestock Homepage – CDFA’s primary webpage with information about Avian Influenza in livestock including dairy. This is the best source for new announcements related to HPAI on dairies.

CDFA Infographic: What to Expect if You Suspect HPAI in Your Herd – CDFA’s primary webpage with information about Avian Influenza in livestock including dairy. This is the best source for new announcements related to HPAI on dairies.

CDFA Biosecurity Homepage – The jumping off point for information biosecurity information for all species.

CDFA Secure Food Supply Homepage – The Secure Food Supply program is a national collaboration designed to facilitate development of state approved enhanced biosecurity plan, allowing producers to continue operations, even during an animal health emergency.

CDFA Dairy Enhanced Biosecurity Plan Manual – This manual can be used to complete CDFA’s Dairy Farm Premises Enhanced Biosecurity Plan Template. When approved an Enhanced Biosecurity Plan will assist producers in maintaining business continuity even in the face of an animal health emergency.

New Fact Sheets from AABP, NMPF and FARM – The American Association of Bovine Practitioners, the National Milk Producers Federation and the national FARM program released on August 28th 2024 three new collaborative fact sheets that benefit from the most recent laboratory research and epidemiologic studies.

- **Dairy Cattle: Biosecurity for H5N1 Virus** - Focused on the most important biosecurity actions producers can take.
- **Spread and Prevention of H5N1 Virus in Dairy Cattle** - Understanding how it spreads makes it easier to prevent.
- **Secure Milk Supply Plan: Enhanced Biosecurity for H5N1** – Explains the State/Federal collaborative Secure Milk Supply (SMS) program’s enhanced biosecurity measures.

Secure Milk Supply Self-Assessment Checklist – This national SMS checklist will assist producers in determining how prepared they are to respond with enhanced biosecurity procedures required during a full-blown foreign animal disease outbreak, like Foot and Mouth Disease.

NMPF / Dairy FARM Program Biosecurity Homepage – The homepage for the National Milk Producer Federation’s biosecurity outreach program.

NMPF / Dairy FARM Program Everyday Dairy Biosecurity Manual – This colorful, comprehensive manual describes with words, diagrams and pictures practices which will help keep your farm free of routine disease incursions.

Free On-Line Biosecurity Training – The NMPF national FARM program offers free on-line training explaining how to implement an enhanced biosecurity plan. For more see the program training guide.

Producers or processors with additional questions related to biosecurity in general or mitigation for HPAI specifically are encouraged to consult with their herd veterinarians or their local CDFA Veterinary Medical Officer. As always, CDQAP and the UC – Davis remain available to assist: Dr. Michael Payne can be contacted at mpayne@ucdavis.edu.