

News Release

The Delmarva Poultry Industries – Health Departments Joint Task Force

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Delmarva Collaboration Sets Avian Influenza Protocols *First Initiative of its Kind in the United States* *Creates Uniform Prevention, Identification and Control Measures*

ANNAPOLIS, Md (August 12, 2005) -- In response to the detection of avian influenza in poultry on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Delaware in 2004 and recent reports of human illness in other countries, a Delmarva task force was created voluntarily to develop practical guidance related to human avian influenza prevention, infection, and control. The *Delmarva Poultry Industries – Health Departments Joint Task Force*, which is made up of animal and human health professionals from the four major poultry companies operating in the region and Delmarva state and local governments, has completed its initial work.

The task force developed a document, “Interim Guidance for Implementation of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Occupational Safety and Health Administration Avian Influenza Recommendations,” to protect persons who might have exposure to an avian influenza virus. The document addresses the use of personal protective equipment to prevent human infection with any strain of the virus, preventive vaccines and antiviral drugs, training workers, basic infection control, decontamination measures, and surveillance for illness.

“While there have been no additional reports of avian influenza on the Delmarva Peninsula and, while the H5N1 variety found in Asia has not been found in the United States, the Delmarva poultry industry and health officials are taking the initiative to protect human health and the state’s leading agricultural sector,” said Maryland Agriculture Secretary Lewis R. Riley. “We feel its work is the first of its kind in the nation and can serve as a model for other states.”

“We are taking a pro-active approach to prevent avian influenza in poultry and humans,” said Maryland Health and Mental Hygiene Secretary Anthony S. McCann. “This is truly a cooperative effort between government agencies and key members of the poultry industry throughout the region and we appreciate their commitment to working with us to ensure public safety.”

The Task Force first met in December 2004 and completed its work earlier in the summer. Procedures, reporting forms, and measures supporting each of the subject areas in the guidance document have been developed and accepted by each party, making the activities of each state and company consistent with one another.

The protocols build on activities that already were in place within the industry, particularly since the avian influenza incidents in 2004. There are on-farm disease prevention measures recommended by the state departments of agriculture and the Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc. but there had not previously been any recognized and standardized recommendations for prevention, control, and identification of human health issues possibly related to avian influenza.

“We are doing everything we can to see that no new avian influenza cases are introduced onto the Delmarva Peninsula and that we take precautionary measures to protect persons who might have contact with an avian influenza virus,” said Bill Satterfield, executive director of the Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc.

Poultry is the leading industry on the Delmarva Peninsula having a wholesale value of more than \$1.7 billion year. With 14,000 poultry company employees and 2,100 farm families growing chicken earning nearly \$500 million last year, the industry affects nearly every Delmarva family in one way or another. The work of the task force will help protect the health of workers and the economic well-being of the entire industry.

Avian influenza is an airborne respiratory virus that spreads easily among birds through nasal and eye secretions as well as manure. It can spread rapidly from flock to flock and can be carried across great distances by people, vehicles, equipment, and clothing, for example. The H7N2 low pathogenic strain that affected chickens in Delaware and Maryland early in 2004 has not been associated with serious human illness.

The type of avian influenza affecting poultry flocks and some humans in Asia is called H5N1 highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1 HPAI). There is no history of that type of avian influenza in the United States, and it is not present now.

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