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Self-declaration of the recovery of freedom from infection with *high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses (HPAI)* in poultry by the Czech Republic

Self-Declaration sent to the World Organisation for Animal Health on 17 May 2021 by Dr Zbyněk Semerád, the Delegate of Czech Republic to the OIE, Director General State Veterinary Administration, Ministry of Agriculture, Czech Republic.

I. Introduction

In accordance with the OIE procedure for publication of self-declaration of freedom from a disease and Chapter 1.6. of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)*, the State Veterinary Administration of the Czech Republic is submitting the following documentation for publication by the OIE, attesting that the Czech Republic has regained country freedom from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses (HPAI) for the entire territory of the Czech Republic from 16 May 2022 in accordance with Article 10.4.6. of the *Terrestrial Code*. The self-declaration covers the whole country and describes 7 outbreaks of HPAI in poultry reported since 1 July 2021. On 26 July 2021, the Czech Republic regained its status as a country free from HPAI in poultry according to the *Terrestrial Code*. The status was maintained until 27 September 2021, when a new HPAI outbreak was confirmed. Vaccination against avian influenza is generally prohibited in the Czech Republic.

The starting date of the self-declaration is 16 May 2022.

II. Evidence that avian influenza is a notifiable disease in the Czech Republic

The poultry holdings in the Czech Republic are registered in the Farm Database according to the provisions of the Act No. 154/2000, Coll. (the Breeding Act) and corresponding Decree of Ministry of Agriculture No. 136/2004, Coll.

HPAI is a notifiable disease according to the [§ 10 of the Veterinary Act No. 166/1999 Coll.](#) and is listed in Annex II "Contagious Diseases and Diseases Communicable from Animals to Humans Considered as Dangerous" to the Act herein.

Control measures for HPAI in poultry, other captive birds and wild birds are laid down in the following European Union (EU) legislation and national legislation:

- [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of The Council \("Animal Health Law"\)](#)
- [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/687](#)
- [Veterinary Act No. 166/1999 Coll.](#)¹

¹ Available only in Czech

Control measures implemented in case of an outbreak in poultry are in accordance with the Chapter 10.4. of the *Terrestrial Code*:

- all suspected cases of avian influenza are immediately investigated by the official veterinarians;
- all poultry on the affected holding are culled and carcasses are disposed of;
- cleaning and disinfection after the culling;
- an epidemiological investigation is conducted, and all contacts are traced and investigated;
- a protection zone (radius 3 km) and a surveillance zone (radius 10 km) are established.

III. Control measures for HPAI outbreaks

On 26 July 2021, the Czech Republic regained its self-declared freedom from HPAI in poultry as per the *Terrestrial Code*. The status was maintained until 27 September 2021, when an outbreak of avian influenza virus of subtype H5 was confirmed in a small backyard flock. HPAI and neuraminidase N1 were confirmed on 29 September 2021. It was the first outbreak in poultry in the Czech Republic since the last outbreak, which ended on 28 May 2021.

On 4 November 2021, the Czech Republic confirmed HPAI in wild birds. This was the first detection of HPAI in wild birds since April 2021. Since then, HPAI has been detected in several wild birds as well as in thirteen backyard flocks with birds other than poultry (birds kept in the single household, their products used exclusively in the same household and no contact with poultry or poultry holdings).

Details of the outbreaks in poultry

From 1 July 2021 to 16 May 2022, a total of 7 HPAI outbreaks of subtype H5N1 in poultry were detected in five out of 14 regions of the Czech Republic (Figure 1). The outbreaks were detected in one backyard flock and six commercial holdings (geese breeders, duck breeders, laying hens, farmed game birds (mallards, pheasants)). A summary of the HPAI outbreaks in poultry from 1 July 2021 to 16 May 2022 can be found in Table 1.

The first HPAI outbreak in poultry of subtype H5N1 was confirmed in a mixed backyard flock on 27 September 2021 in the village Trhové Dušníky, Příbram district in the Central Bohemian Region. A suspicion of avian influenza was raised due to clinical symptoms.

Further two holdings with approximately 1 100 geese breeders (ducks and laying hens were also kept on the holding) and 4 000 geese breeders in the villages of Byňov and Údolí u Nových Hradů in the South Bohemian Region were found to be infected with the HPAI subtype H5N1 on 19 and 23 November 2021. A suspicion of avian influenza was raised based on the clinical symptoms in geese. On these holdings, geese breeders with a high genetic value (parent flocks of the Czech goose breed) were kept. Due to this reason, the derogation from Article 12(1)(a) for these flocks of geese according to Article 13(2)(d) of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/687 has been granted. Selected geese, which were repeatedly tested for avian influenza with negative results, were not culled. On 16 February (first dose) and 18 March 2022 (second dose), emergency vaccination of these geese was carried out. Remaining geese were culled. All vaccinated geese (a total of 813 geese) are individually marked with wing marks. Nobilis Influenza H5N2 emulsion for injection for chickens (inactivated viral vaccine) - registered by the European Medicines Agency within the EU was used for emergency vaccination and the summary of product characteristics (SPC) is available here.² In addition:

- The vaccination scheme was performed in accordance with SPC
- The vaccine was given intramuscularly in accordance with SPC
- The vaccination was performed by an official veterinarian
- No adverse reactions were noticed

All necessary measures to prevent spread of infection from the affected holdings were implemented in accordance with the EU legislation (biosecurity measures, isolation of animals, clinical surveillance and laboratory examinations). Following the vaccination, passive clinical surveillance was carried out, and samples (cloacal swabs) for virological testing (RT-PCR AIV) were taken on 24 March 2022. All samples were tested in the National Reference Laboratory for avian influenza and all samples were negative for avian influenza virus. We confirmed that the AI virus does not circulate on the holdings.

² Only available in Czech

At present, no emergency veterinary measures are applied to these holdings. Neither holding supply animals or hatching eggs to the market.

On 23 December 2021, an outbreak of HPAI subtype H5N1 was confirmed on a laying hen holding with approximately 190 000 hens in the village Libotenice in the Ústí nad Labem Region. A suspicion of avian influenza was raised based on the clinical symptoms.

A holding consisting of approximately 6 000 pheasants in the village Hovorany in the South Moravian Region was found to be infected with HPAI subtype H5N1 on 27 December 2021. A suspicion of avian influenza was raised based on the clinical symptoms.

On 5 January 2022, an outbreak of HPAI subtype H5N1 was confirmed on a holding consisting of approximately 300 mallards in the village Hajany in the South Bohemian Region. Mallards showed no clinical signs. Samples were taken within the surveillance in a protection zone of the outbreak of HPAI in birds other than poultry.

The last outbreak of HPAI subtype H5N1 was confirmed on a duck holding in Lipoltice with approximately 3 800 breeding ducks (juvenile ducks) on 22 January 2022. A suspicion of avian influenza was raised based on the clinical symptoms.

All remaining poultry was immediately culled (except some geese mentioned above) and the carcasses, poultry products were disposed by rendering. Preliminary cleaning and disinfection of buildings, equipment, vehicles etc. were performed immediately after the culling. Finally, final cleaning and disinfection were carried out on the affected holdings. Final cleaning and disinfection were completed on 16 April 2022.

Protection and surveillance zones (3 and 10 km) were established around all affected holdings and implemented all necessary measures to prevent spread of infection from the affected holdings in accordance with EU legislation. The State Veterinary Administration ordered a ban of any movements of live and slaughtered poultry, other birds, eggs, meat, etc. in protection and surveillance zones, without the permission of the State Veterinary Administration.

The most probable source of infection is an introduction of the virus into the affected holding via wild birds.

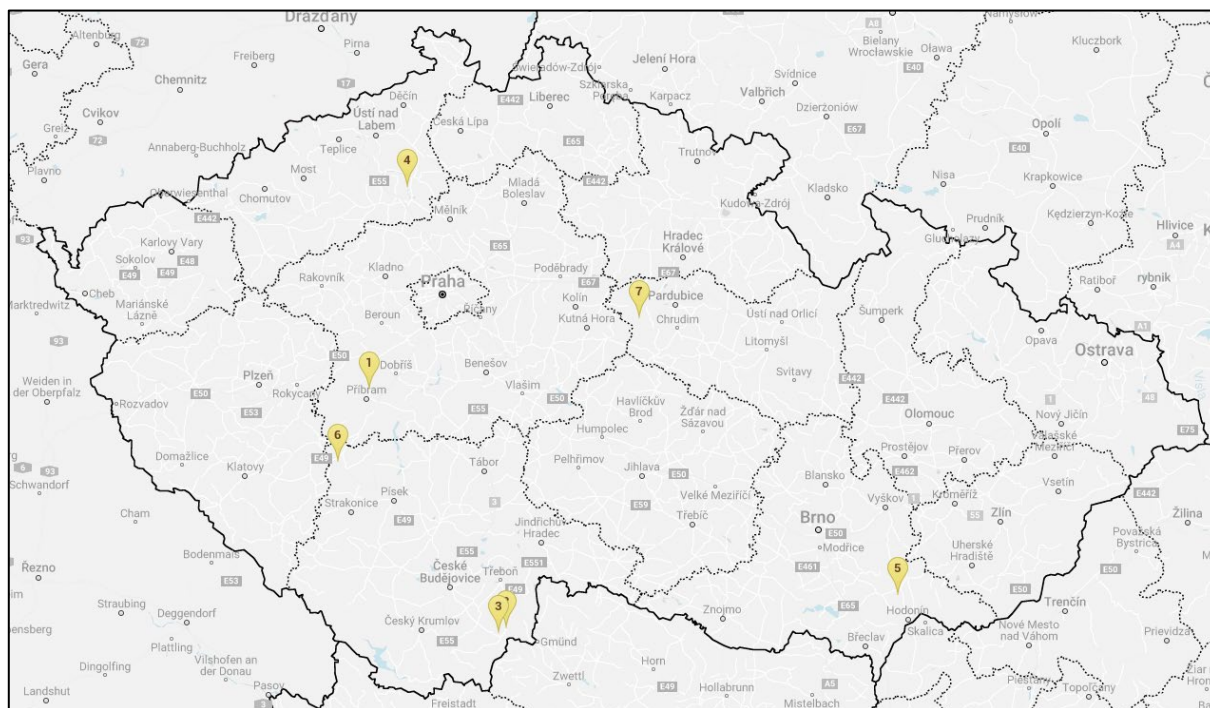
Within the territory of the Czech Republic, there are currently no active HPAI outbreaks in poultry or any restricted zones.

An immediate notification and follow-up reports (including the final reports) were sent to the OIE World Animal Health Information System (OIE-WAHIS) and can be found on the OIE website.

Table 1: HPAI outbreaks in poultry in the Czech Republic from 1 July 2021 to 16 May 2022.

Outbreak no.	Village	Holding type	Suspicion type	Susceptible birds approximate no.	Region	Completion of final cleaning and disinfection
1	Trhové Dušníky	backyard – laying hens, ducks, geese	clinic	33	Central Bohemian	05.10.2021
2	Byňov	commercial – geese breeders, ducks, laying hens	clinic	1 500	South Bohemian	19.01.2022
3	Údolí u Nových Hradů	commercial – geese breeders	clinic	4 000	South Bohemian	19.01.2022
4	Libotenice	commercial – laying hens	clinic	190 000	Ústí nad Labem	16.04.2022
5	Hovorany	commercial – pheasants	clinic	6 500	South Moravian	21.01.2022
6	Hajany	commercial – mallards	surveillance	300	South Bohemian	15.01.2022
7	Lipoltice	commercial – duck breeders	clinic	3 800	Pardubice	14.03.2021

Figure 1: Localisation of HPAI outbreak in poultry



IV. Surveillance and early warning system

The Czech surveillance programme and strategy in order to demonstrate the freedom from HPAI infection is in accordance with Chapter 1.4. on Animal Health Surveillance and Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

Passive surveillance for avian influenza in poultry has been in place since 2005 – early warning system. According to the Veterinary Act No 166/1999 Coll. as amended, all farmers have to report disease suspicions (high mortality or clinical signs) to the competent veterinary authority. Farmers with commercial holdings have the obligation to record the changes in poultry health according to the Veterinary Act and Decree No. 342/2012 Coll. In case of unusual changes in poultry health, farmers have to contact the competent veterinary authority. The following changes in poultry health are mandatory to be notified:

- drop in feed and water intake higher than 20 %,
- drop in egg production higher than 5 % for more than two days,
- mortality rate higher than 3 % in a week,
- any clinical sign or post-mortem lesion suggesting avian influenza.

All suspected cases of avian influenza are investigated immediately by the veterinary authorities. When an official veterinarian checks the holding where an outbreak is suspected, the following measures are carried out: a check of the production and health records of the holding, a clinical inspection of the birds and sampling. The testing of samples is carried out in the National Reference Laboratory for Avian Influenza.

Active surveillance programme in poultry

In 2021, the active surveillance programme for poultry was implemented in compliance with the requirements of [Commission Decision 2010/367/EU](#) and was based on serological testing in all target species of poultry.

Both holdings are under the supervision of the State Veterinary Administration.

The following target populations are included in the active surveillance programme: laying hens, free range laying hens, chicken breeders, turkey breeders, duck breeders, geese breeders, fattening turkeys, fattening ducks, fattening geese, farmed game birds (gallinaceous) and farmed game birds (waterfowl).

In 2021, samples from ten birds (except ducks, geese and mallards) were taken in each tested poultry holding, and from the different sheds, where more than one shed is present in a holding. In case of holdings with waterfowls, twenty blood samples were taken for serological testing from each selected holding. ELISA test was used for initial serological screening of blood samples in poultry. In the case of positive ELISA reaction, typing by HI test (haemagglutination inhibition test) was performed. If HI tests confirm H5 or H7 antibodies, an epidemiological investigation and sampling for testing by molecular methods (RT-PCR) were performed on the poultry holding.

From 1 January 2022, the active surveillance programme in waterfowls was changed in accordance with the requirements of [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/689](#). The new active surveillance programme in poultry is incorporated in the document "[Methodology of Animal Health Control and Ordered Vaccination 2022](#)" which determines the main strategies in a veterinary care and specifies obligatory preventive and diagnostics actions in the Czech Republic in accordance with the Veterinary Act. The new active surveillance programme in poultry includes all poultry species mentioned above. However, ducks, geese, farmed game birds (waterfowl) have been tested using molecular methods since 1 January 2022. Oropharyngeal/tracheal or cloacal swab samples are taken from each holding from forty birds. The samples are analysed using RT-PCR. Holdings with gallinaceous birds are still tested serologically (as in 2021).

Samples are collected from all production categories of poultry and all poultry species during the year.

The active surveillance programme is applied on the whole territory of the Czech Republic, so that samples are considered representative. The programme is implemented in all 14 regions of the Czech Republic.

Samples are taken by official veterinarians (swabs, blood) or by approved private veterinarians (only blood) who are in charge of taking official samples. The testing of samples is carried out at the National Reference Laboratory for Avian Influenza.

From 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, a total of 2 710 samples of blood were tested from a total of 190 poultry holdings. Two poultry holdings were positive for H5 antibodies, but no high pathogenicity virus was detected by molecular testing (RT-PCR AIV).

From 1 January 2022 to 16 May 2022, a total of 570 samples of blood and swabs were tested from a total of 30 poultry holdings. No high pathogenicity virus was detected by molecular testing (RT-PCR AIV).

The overall results of active surveillance in poultry in 2021 and 2022 are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Avian influenza active surveillance results from 1 July 2021 to 16 May 2022 in the Czech Republic

Category of poultry	from 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021		from 24 January 2022 ³ to 16 May 2022		Results
	No. of sampled holdings	No. of samples (blood)	No. of sampled holdings ⁴	No. of samples (blood, swabs)	
Laying hens	30	300	11	110	negative
Free range laying hens	21	210	4	40	negative
Geese breeders	6	120	0	0	negative
Duck breeders	15	300	0	0	negative
Fattening turkeys	32	320	4	40	negative
Fattening geese	16	320	0	0	negative
Fattening ducks	42	840	8	320	negative
Farmed game birds (gallinaceous)	26	260	2	20	negative
Farmed game birds (waterfowl)	2	40	1	40	negative
Total	190	2 710	30	570	negative

Active surveillance programme in restricted zones

³ Date last stamping out policy was completed

⁴ Most samples are taken in the second half of the year as the production of many types of poultry is seasonal, hence the number of holdings sampled in early 2022 appears significantly lower than in 2021.

Active intensified surveillance was carried out after stamping out policy and preliminary disinfection in outbreak in line with Article 10.4.28. of the *Terrestrial Code*. The active surveillance included official checks in poultry holdings in protection zones and surveillance selected on the basis of risk analysis. The risk factors were especially: commercial use of poultry and products, the number of birds kept on the holding, the holdings located close to water bodies, the holdings with poultry of different poultry species, the holdings epidemiologically linked to the outbreaks and the holdings close to the outbreaks etc. The results of intensified surveillance carried out in protection zones established around HPAI outbreak are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Avian influenza virological surveillance in protection zones (after stamping out) around the HPAI outbreaks in poultry from 27 September 2021 to 16 May 2022

Outbreak	Region/	No. of checked holdings – protection zone	No. of samples (tracheal/ oropharyngeal and cloacal swabs, carcasses)	Results (RT-PCR AIV)	Results after the last stamping out policy (24/01/2022)
Trhové Dušňiky	Central Bohemian	22	978	negative	-
Byňov, Údolí u Nových Hradů (common restricted zone)	South Bohemian Region	11	2 529	negative positive*	negative
Libotenice	Ústí nad Labem	9	286	negative	-
Hovorany	South Moravian Region	5	130	negative	-
Hajany	South Bohemian Region	8	150	negative	-
Lipoltice	Pardubice	10	234	-	negative

* all birds with positive results for HPAI were culled (the last positive result was identified on 18 December 2021, since this date all samples tested for avian influenza were negative)

Surveillance programme in wild birds

Surveillance for HPAI in wild bird is implemented as a passive surveillance system by laboratory investigation of moribund wild birds or birds found dead. Surveillance is specifically directed towards target species listed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Cloacal and tracheal/oropharyngeal swabs or tissues from wild birds are taken for virological testing (PCR) in the State Veterinary Institutes.

From 1 July 2021 to 16 May 2022, a total of 75 wild birds were tested for avian influenza in the Czech Republic. Of this number, a total of 32 HPAI positive wild birds were detected in 6 of the 14 regions. So far, HPAI has been detected in the following species: 13 mute swans (*Cygnus olor*), 19 herons (*Ardea cinerea*, *Ardea alba*). The H5N1 subtype of HPAI was detected in all positive cases. The last positive HPAI case in wild birds was confirmed on 4 February 2022. Since then, no positive case has been confirmed in the Czech Republic.

V. Measures implemented to maintain freedom

Awareness campaign and risk mitigation measures

Information of the epidemiological situation related to avian influenza and recommendations and guidance to keepers of poultry and other captive birds, hunters, veterinarians and general public have been published on the website of the State Veterinary Administration and shared via social media and press releases.

Due to the unfavourable HPAI situation in the Czech Republic at the end of 2021, the State Veterinary Administration issued veterinary emergency measures so-called “housing order” in the whole territory of the Czech Republic on 23 November 2021, which were in force until 22 February 2022. Poultry and birds other than poultry (birds in backyards) in general had to be kept indoor due to the increasing risk of HPAI. The compulsory housing order required all poultry to be housed indoors to protect the poultry from contact with wild birds. The housing order applied to the whole country and to all categories of poultry with certain exemptions for animal welfare reasons.

The following requirements apply to commercial poultry holdings in the whole country (Decree No. 342/2012 Coll.):

- the feed and drinking water for poultry shall be arranged indoors or in a place where wild waterfowl cannot reach;
- prohibition of keeping waterfowl together with other poultry or captive birds;
- holdings shall be protected against wild birds and other animals.

Import of poultry and poultry products

All imports from third countries and intra-Community trade of poultry, poultry products and hatching eggs are subject to veterinary certification and controls in accordance with the EU legislation Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/2035, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/688 and Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/692 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2016/429 and in accordance with the requirements of the Articles 10.4.7. to 10.4.22. of the *Terrestrial Code*. When poultry and other birds, hatching eggs, poultry meat, table eggs and products thereof are imported from non-EU-countries, consignments must be accompanied by an animal health certificate.

VI. Conclusions

Considering that:

- Avian influenza is a notifiable disease in the Czech Republic;
- Vaccination against avian influenza is generally prohibited in the Czech Republic; in 2022 only one exception to this ban was applied – the emergency vaccination of the genetics of valuable geese breeders was carried out;
- Prior to the occurrence of the HPAI outbreak at the end of September 2021, the Czech Republic was free from high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses in poultry from 26 July 2021;
- Stamping out policy was applied (including cleaning and disinfection of the affected holdings);
- More than 28 days have elapsed as stipulated in Article 10.4.6. of the *Terrestrial Code* since the completion of the final cleaning and disinfection of the affected holding;
- The surveillance has been carried out in accordance with Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30. of the *Terrestrial Code*;
- Ongoing avian influenza awareness programme and national rules for biosecurity measures are in place.

The OIE Delegate of the Czech Republic declares that the country complies with the requirements to declare recovery of freedom from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses (HPAI) in poultry as of 16 May 2022, in accordance with Chapter 1.6. and Article 10.4.6. of the *Terrestrial Code* (2021 edition) and consistent with the information provided to the OIE-WAHIS.

Statement to be included in the self-declaration document.

I, the undersigned,
..... Zbyněk Semerád, DVM, Director General (CVO).....

Delegate of.....the Czech Republic.....

to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), takes responsibility for the self-declaration of freedom from

high pathogenicity avian influenza in poultry.....
..... (disease)

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Drawn up on 14. 5. 2022

Signature of the Delegate:

