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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

Declaration sent to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, founded as OIE) on 8 May 2024 by Dr Zbyněk Semerád, Director General, State Veterinary Administration of the Czech Republic, Ministry of Agriculture.

I. Introduction

In accordance with the WOAHO procedure for the publication of the self-declaration of freedom from a disease, Chapter 1.6., and Chapter 10.4. of the WOAHO Terrestrial Animal Health Code (*Terrestrial Code*), the State Veterinary Administration of the Czech Republic is submitting the following documentation for publication by the WOAHO attesting that the Czech Republic has regained country freedom from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza virus (HPAI) in poultry for the entire territory of the Czech Republic from 8 May 2024 in accordance with Article 10.4.6. of Terrestrial Code. The self-declaration covers the entire country and describes 5 outbreaks of HPAI in poultry reported since 30 January 2024. On 11 July 2023, the Czech Republic regained its status as a country free from HPAI in poultry according to *Terrestrial Code*. The status was maintained until 30 January 2024, when a new HPAI outbreak in poultry was confirmed.

The starting date of the self-declaration is 8 May 2024.

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

Poultry holdings in the Czech Republic are registered in the register of holdings pursuant to the provisions of Act No 154/2000 (Breeding Act) and its implementing Decree of the Ministry of Agriculture No 136/2004.

HPAI is a notifiable disease according to [§ 10 of Veterinary Act, i.e. Act No 166/1999¹](#) and is listed in Annex II "Animal diseases and diseases communicable from animals to humans considered dangerous" to that Act.

¹ Available in the Czech language only

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

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

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

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

III. Control measures for HPAI outbreaks

On 11 July 2023, the Czech Republic regained its self-declared freedom from HPAI in poultry in accordance with the *Terrestrial Code*. This status was maintained until 30 January 2024, when an outbreak of avian influenza virus of subtype HPAI H5N1 was confirmed in a commercial holding keeping parent flock of *Gallus gallus domesticus*. This was the first outbreak of poultry in the Czech Republic since the last outbreak, which ended on 9 April 2024.

On 2 January 2024, the Czech Republic confirmed HPAI in backyard flocks. This was the first detection of HPAI in backyard flocks since May 2023. Since then, HPAI has been detected in 23 backyard flocks with birds other than poultry (birds kept in a single household, their products used exclusively in the same household, no contact with poultry or poultry holdings).

On 25 January 2024, the Czech Republic confirmed HPAI in wild birds. This was the first detection of HPAI in wild birds since July 2023. Since then, HPAI has been detected in 15 wild birds.

Details of the outbreaks in poultry

From 30 January 2024 to 7 May 2024, a total of 5 outbreaks of HPAI subtype H5N1 in poultry were detected in 2 out of 14 regions of the Czech Republic (see Figure 1). The outbreaks occurred in commercial holdings (parent flocks of *Gallus gallus domesticus*, fattening ducks, ready-to-lay poultry). A summary of the HPAI outbreaks in poultry from 30 January 2024 to 7 May 2024 can be found in Table 1.

The first outbreak of HPAI in poultry of subtype H5N1 was confirmed on a commercial holding with approx. 69 000 parent flock of *Gallus gallus domesticus* on 30 January 2024 in the municipality of Choceň in the Pardubice Region. Suspicion of avian influenza was raised due to an increased mortality in poultry and the presence of clinical symptoms.

On 2 February 2024, an outbreak of HPAI, subtype H5N1, was confirmed on a commercial holding with approx. 20 000 parent flock of *Gallus gallus domesticus* in the municipality of Sklené in the Pardubice Region. The suspicion on avian influenza was raised due to an increased mortality in poultry and the presence of clinical symptoms.

On 5 February 2024, an outbreak of HPAI, subtype H5N1, was confirmed in a commercial holding with approximately 50 000 fattening ducks in the municipality of Valdívov in the Vysočina Region (outbreak no.3). Suspicion of avian influenza was raised due to an increased mortality of ducks and the presence of clinical symptoms.

Two last outbreaks were confirmed on holdings with parent flock of *Gallus gallus domesticus* in municipalities of Vaneč and Častotice in the Vysočina Region. The first affected holding with approximately 25 000 parent flock of *Gallus gallus domesticus* was detected as infected with HPAI, subtype H5N1, on 14 February 2024 (outbreak no.4). The second affected holding with approximately 45 000 ready-to-lay poultry was found to be infected with HPAI, subtype H5N1, on 14 February 2024 (outbreak no.5). Two of the affected holdings were located in the surveillance zone of the outbreak no.3. Suspicion of avian influenza was raised based on surveillance in relation to outbreak no.3 and a slight increase in mortality of hens without other clinical symptoms. A common restriction zone was established around the outbreaks no.4 and no.5.

All remaining poultry on the affected holdings was immediately culled and carcasses and poultry products were disposed of by rendering. Preliminary cleaning and disinfection of buildings, equipment, vehicles etc. were carried out immediately after culling. Finally, the final cleaning and disinfection were carried out in the affected holdings. The final cleaning and disinfection of the last HPAI outbreak was completed on 9 April 2024.

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

The most probable source of infection is the introduction of the virus into affected holdings *via* indirect contact with poultry and wild birds.

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

An immediate notification and follow-up reports (including the final report) were submitted to WAHIS: World Animal Health Information System and can be found on the official WOAH website.

IV. Surveillance and early warning system

The Czech surveillance program and strategy for demonstrating the freedom from HPAI infection are 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 program in poultry

Passive surveillance for avian influenza in poultry has been in place since the year 2005 – early warning system. According to the Veterinary Act, i.e. Act No 166/1999, as amended, all keepers are obliged to report any suspicion of disease (high mortality or clinical signs) to the relevant competent veterinary authority. Keepers with commercial holdings shall record changes in the health status of their poultry in accordance with the Veterinary Act and Decree No 342/2012. In the case of unusual changes in the poultry health, the keepers shall contact the relevant competent veterinary authority. The following poultry health changes must be reported:

- decrease in feed and water intake higher than 20 %,
- decrease in egg production higher than 5 % for more than two days,
- mortality rate higher than 3 % in one week,
- any clinical signs or *post-mortem* lesions that are suggestive of avian influenza.

Figure 1: Localisation of HPAI outbreaks in poultry

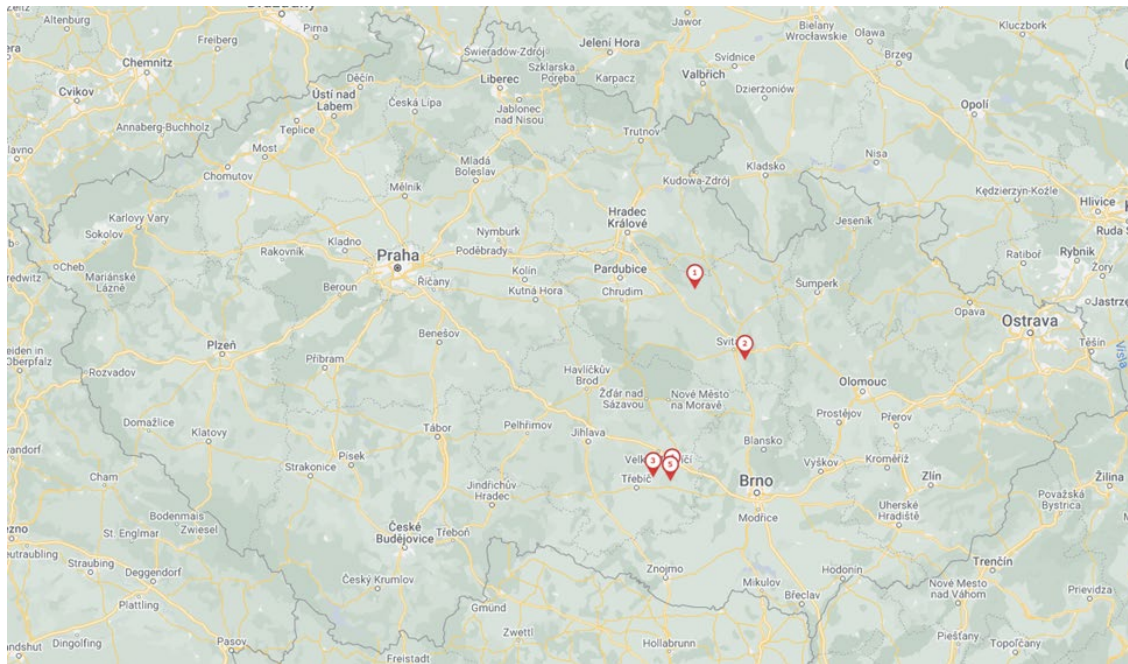


Table 1: HPAI outbreaks in poultry in the Czech Republic from 30 January 2024 to 7 May 2024

Outbreak number	Municipality	Type of holding	Type of suspicion	Approximate number of susceptible birds	Region	Completion of the final cleaning and disinfection	Observation number from WAHIS
1	Choceň	commercial – parent flock	clinical	69 000	Pardubice	28 February 2024	HPAI-1/2024 (ob_131116)
2	Sklené	commercial – parent flock	clinical	20 000	Pardubice	25 February 2024	HPAI-2/2024 (ob_131876)
3	Valdívov	commercial – fattening ducks	clinical	50 000	Vysočina	9 April 2024	HPAI-3/2024 (ob_131877)
4	Vaneč	commercial – parent flock	surveillance	25 000	Vysočina	25 March 2024	HPAI-4/2024 (ob_132511)
5	Častotice	commercial – ready-to-lay poultry	surveillance	45 000	Vysočina	18 March 2024	HPAI-5/2024 (ob_132512)

All suspected cases of avian influenza are immediately investigated by veterinary authorities. When an official veterinarian inspects a holding where an outbreak is suspected, the following measures are taken: inspection of the production and health records of the holding concerned, clinical inspection of the birds and sampling. Sample testing is carried out at the State Veterinary Institutes.

Active surveillance program in poultry

The active surveillance program in poultry has been implemented in accordance with the requirements of [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) No 2020/689](#) and is based on molecular and serological testing of target species of poultry. The following target populations are included in the active surveillance program: laying hens, free-range laying hens, chicken breeders, turkey breeders, duck breeders, goose breeders, fattening turkeys, fattening ducks, fattening geese, farmed game birds – gallinaceous and farmed game birds – waterfowl.

The active surveillance program in poultry is incorporated in the document “[Methodology of Animal Health Control and Ordered Vaccination](#)”² for the relevant year; the document determines the main strategies in veterinary care and specifies obligatory preventive and diagnostic actions in the Czech Republic in accordance with the Veterinary Act.

Holdings with gallinaceous birds are tested serologically. Samples are taken from ten birds (except for ducks, geese and farmed game birds – waterfowl) from different poultry houses/coops on each tested poultry holding, if there is more than one poultry house or coop on a holding. The ELISA test is used for the initial serologic screening of blood samples from gallinaceous birds. In the case of a positive ELISA reaction, typing is performed by hemagglutination inhibition test (HI). If the HI test confirms the presence of H5 or H7 antibodies, an epidemiological investigation and sampling for molecular testing (real-time RT-PCR) is performed on the holding.

On holdings with waterfowl (ducks, geese, farmed game birds), oropharyngeal/tracheal and cloacal swabs are taken for molecular testing in accordance with the “Methodology of Animal Health Control and Ordered Vaccination” for the relevant year. The samples are analysed by real-time RT-PCR.

During the year, samples are taken from all production categories of poultry and all poultry species. The active surveillance program is implemented in the entire territory of the Czech Republic so that the samples are considered to be representative. The program is implemented in all 14 regions of the Czech Republic.

Samples (20 oropharyngeal/tracheal and 20 cloacal swabs) are taken for laboratory testing by virological methods from each registered holding with fattening and breeding ducks and geese and farmed game birds – waterfowl.

From each registered holding with free range laying hens, breeding turkeys and farmed game birds - gallinaceous birds, samples (10 blood samples) are taken for laboratory testing by serological methods. On holdings with laying hens and fattening turkeys, surveillance is based on a representative sampling scheme - risk analysis is used to select the holdings to be sampled.

Risk factors are:

- areas in the proximity of water reservoirs where migratory birds gather
- areas where HPAI virus has been detected in poultry or wild birds in the last 3 years
- areas where antibodies against AI virus have been detected during AI surveillance.

Samples are taken by official veterinarians (swabs, blood) or by authorised private veterinarians (blood only) who are responsible for taking official samples. Samples are tested only in the laboratories of the State Veterinary Institutes.

From 30 January 2024 to 7 May 2024, a total of 1,230 blood samples and swabs from 63 poultry holdings were tested. No antibodies against subtypes H5 or H7 and no avian influenza viruses have been detected during this period of an active surveillance in poultry. The overall results of the active surveillance in poultry from 30 January 2024 to 7 May 2024 are presented in Table 2.

² Available in the Czech language only

Table 2: Avian influenza active surveillance results from 30 January 2024 to 7 May 2024 in the Czech Republic

Category of poultry	From 30 January 2024 to 9 April 2024		From 10 April 2024 to 7 May 2024		Results (ELISA/real time RT-PCR)
	Number of sampled holdings	Number of samples (blood, swabs)	Number of sampled holdings	Number of samples (blood, swabs)	
Laying hens	5	50	16	160	negative
Free-range laying hens	4	40	7	70	negative
Duck breeders	0	0	3	120	negative
Goose breeders	0	0	2	80	negative
Fattening turkeys	1	10	9	90	negative
Fattening ducks	1	40	14	560	negative
Game birds – gallinaceous*	0	0	1	10	negative
Total	11	140	52	1,090	negative

*Farmed birds

Active surveillance program in restricted zones

After stamping out and preliminary cleaning and disinfection of outbreaks, the active surveillance program is intensified in accordance with Article 10.4.28. of the *Terrestrial Code*. Active surveillance includes official controls on poultry holdings in protection and surveillance zones and surveillance selected on the basis of risk analysis. Risk factors are, in particular: commercial use of poultry and poultry products, number of birds kept on the holding in question, holdings keeping poultry of different poultry species, holdings epidemiologically linked to outbreaks, location of holdings close to outbreaks, etc. Sampling in protection zones for molecular testing is necessary for the eradication of HPAI in the Czech Republic. The strengthened surveillance was implemented for the purpose of veterinary surveillance in protection zones in order to move poultry and to exclude the circulation of the HPAI virus in the zones. The results of the strengthened surveillance carried out in protection zones established around of HPAI outbreaks in poultry are presented in Table 3.

The number of birds to be sampled (1 oropharyngeal/tracheal and 1 cloacal swab from 1 bird) shall be determined as follows:

- If the holding contains up to 15 birds, all birds on the holding shall be sampled.
- If there are between 16 and 50 birds on the holding, 15 birds shall be sampled with priority given to waterfowl.
- If the holding has 51 birds or more, at least 5 dead birds or samples (swabs) from 30 % of the birds kept but not more than 30 birds must be sampled. Samples shall preferably be taken from waterfowl.

The sample size used is based on scientific publications in the [EFSA Journal](#). The EFSA Journal publishes the scientific advice of the European Food Safety Authority that underpins the policies and measures taken to protect European consumers and the environment. Articles published in EFSA Supporting Publications inform about the Authority's scientific assessments or report on scientific events organized in the context of its scientific mandate.

Table 3: Avian influenza molecular surveillance in protection zones (after stamping out) established around HPAI outbreaks in poultry from 30 January 2024 to 7 May 2024

Outbreak	Region	Number of checked holdings – protection zone	Number of samples (tracheal/oropharyngeal and cloacal swabs, carcasses)	Results (real-time RT-PCR)
Choceň	Pardubice	10	185	negative
Skelené	Pardubice	8	135	negative
Valdík	Vysočina	11	135	negative
Vaneč	Vysočina	19	196	negative
Častotice	Vysočina	19	196	negative

Surveillance program in wild birds

Surveillance for HPAI in wild birds is carried out as a passive surveillance system through laboratory testing of sick wild birds or birds found dead. The surveillance is specifically focused on target species listed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Cloacal and oropharyngeal/tracheal swabs or tissues from wild birds are taken for molecular testing (real-time RT-PCR) at the State Veterinary Institutes.

From 30 January 2024 to 7 May 2024, a total of 22 wild birds were tested for avian influenza in the Czech Republic. Of these, a total of 11 HPAI-positive wild birds were detected in 4 out of 14 regions of the Czech Republic. To date, HPAI has been detected in the following species: 8 mute swans (*Cygnus olor*), 1 graylag goose (*Anser anser*), and 2 mallard ducks (*Anas platyrhynchos*). The H5N1 subtype of HPAI was detected in all positive cases. The last positive case of HPAI in wild birds was confirmed on 12 March 2024.

V. Measures implemented to maintain freedom

Awareness campaign and risk mitigation measures

Information on the animal health situation related to avian influenza and recommendations and guidance for keepers of poultry and other captive birds, hunters, veterinarians and the general public were published on the official website of the State Veterinary Administration and shared *via* social media and press releases. URL link (in Czech language): <https://www.svscr.cz/zdravi-zvirat/ptaci-chripka-influenza-drubeze/informace-pro-verejnost/>

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

- feeds and drinking water for poultry had to be kept indoors or in a place which wild waterfowl could not reach;
- prohibition of keeping waterfowl together with other poultry or captive birds;
- holdings had to be protected from wild birds and other animals.

Import of poultry and poultry products

All imports from third countries, as well as intra-Community trade in poultry, poultry products and hatching eggs, are subject to veterinary certification and controls in accordance with the following EU legislation: [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) No 2019/2035](#), [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) No 2020/688](#) and [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) No 2020/692](#) and in accordance with the requirements of Articles 10.4.7. to 10.4.22. of the *Terrestrial Code*. When importing poultry and other birds, hatching eggs, poultry meat, table eggs and products thereof from non-EU-countries, consignments must be accompanied by an animal health certificate.

VI. Conclusion

Considering that:

- Avian influenza is a notifiable disease in the Czech Republic,
- Prior to the occurrence of the HPAI outbreak at the beginning of January 2024, the Czech Republic had been free of highly pathogenic avian influenza virus in poultry since 11 July 2023,
- The stamping out policy, cleaning and disinfection were applied on all affected holdings after the confirmation of the virus in poultry. The final date of cleaning and disinfection was certified on 9 April 2024,
- 28 days have elapsed as stipulated in Article 10.4.6. of *Terrestrial Code* since the completion of the final cleaning and disinfection on the last affected holding,
- Surveillance has been carried out in accordance with Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30. of the *Terrestrial Code*,
- An ongoing avian influenza awareness program and national rules for biosecurity measures are in place.

The WOA Delegate of the Czech Republic declares that the country complies with the requirements to declare the recovery of freedom from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza virus (HPAI) in poultry as of 8 May 2024, in accordance with Chapter 1.6. and Article 10.4.6. of *Terrestrial Code* (2023 edition) and consistent with the information provided to the WAHIS.