

New avian influenza vaccine trials begin in UK

5.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

New targeted trial in turkeys will test vaccine efficacy as part of fight to protect wild and captive birds

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) vaccine trials have started today (Thursday 5 March) in a major step forward in the fight against the disease.

New trials will explore the potential for the latest vaccines to protect birds, focusing on turkeys only in England, providing valuable insight into how well vaccines work in the field, how surveillance can be managed to retain trade and how vaccines can help manage the disease.

The scale of avian influenza outbreaks in the UK and Europe within the last few years has been unprecedented, causing devastation for bird keepers on the frontline and the poultry sector. Annual outbreaks cost the UK Government and industry up to £174m each year. The disease has significantly impacted both captive and wild birds globally since 2020.

Turkeys have been selected as a priority species for further research as they are highly susceptible to avian influenza, with outbreaks resulting in severe clinical signs with rapid and elevated mortality rates.

The trial will sample a small group of birds under strict supervision following approval from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and using UK/ EU authorised vaccines. Vaccinating poultry against bird flu is not currently allowed more widely in the UK.

Biosecurity Minister Baroness Hayman said:

We know what a terrible toll this disease has annually on our farmers and poultry sector.

The start of new vaccine trials are a significant step forward in our fight against this disease and will contribute to global research efforts. We are hopeful vaccines can be used in the UK as an additional tool to control bird flu to protect the UK's biosecurity and food supply.

UK Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss said:

This targeted trial is going to be really key for our understanding of how HPAI vaccines can be effectively used for disease control in the UK. They have the potential to be a really valuable additional tool in helping us protect birds from infection.

Stringent biosecurity will always remain our best defence and I urge all bird keepers to continue to take the steps needed to prevent avian influenza spreading onto their premises.

Animal and Plant Health Agency Avian Influenza Disease expert Professor Ashley Banyard said:

The scourge of this disease has impacted both captive and wild birds populations globally since 2020. The impact has varied annually, which makes forecasting of disease events very difficult.

Assessing the ability of these vaccines to generate an immune response in turkeys will give a good indication of the suitability of these vaccines as tools to protect birds against H5N1.

The trial will evaluate how vaccines could be safely and effectively integrated into the UK's disease control strategy, generate data on vaccine efficacy and contribute to the growing international body of research on HPAI vaccination. It will help us understand how vaccines can be effectively used in the UK as an additional tool to control bird flu and provide valuable information on vaccine effectiveness and contribute to global research efforts, during these challenging times,

The potential benefits of HPAI vaccination are being considered in several countries experiencing similar challenges to the UK. In Europe there are ongoing trials of vaccines in Italy and the Netherlands.

Stringent biosecurity remains the best defence against the disease. All bird keepers should familiarise themselves with the steps they need to take to prevent bird flu and avoid any potential for it to spread. Remaining vigilant for signs of disease, and reporting this promptly, will help to keep birds safe.

The trials will last for 24 weeks and will provide insight into the final recommendations of the UK HPAI vaccination taskforce.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- In July 2025, the Taskforce published a report outlining the current status and challenges of vaccination, exploring future options for vaccination of birds in different sectors including a cost benefit analysis and a recommendation for a domestic field vaccination trial in turkeys.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-avian-influenza-vaccine-trials-begin-in-uk>