



# The Chick Papers

A Monthly Newsletter from the Georgia Poultry Laboratory

October 2015

## Georgia Avian Influenza Hotline

**770-766-6850**

With migratory birds returning South by way of the Atlantic and Central Flyways, there is an increased risk of infection from the Avian Influenza Virus (AIV) in backyard and/or commercial poultry operations. Georgia has established a dedicated AI Hotline phone number that backyard bird owners can call when they feel they have problem flocks with clinical signs consistent with AIV. The Hotline has many features that will expedite evaluations of the suspect backyard flocks and elicit a prompt response from poultry clinicians throughout the State of Georgia. Some of the key features of the hotline system are included below.

**Backyard flock owners can call the Georgia AI Hotline at any time.** The Georgia AI Hotline is a dedicated phone number reserved primarily for suspect AIV inquiries. If the call is made during regular business hours, an administrative secretary will screen the call and ask the owner a series of questions including flock owner name, contact information (phone number, email address), flock location, size and other pertinent information. An assessment form is completed on the problem(s) the owner is experiencing with the flock. Each question on the AI assessment sheet is weighted for relativeness to AIV infections and a total score is tabulated. If the total score exceeds a threshold value, the secretary immediately contacts a clinician; providing all acquired information including the assessment form. The clinician will then contact the backyard owner immediately (with some understanding of the flock status). Flocks with sub-threshold scores are communicated to the clinician on the same day and the clinician will follow up with the owner within 24 hours.

If the call is missed by the secretary, the backyard caller listens to a short greeting that asks for owner name, contact phone number and a short description of the problems observed in the flock. A series of emails will automatically be sent to seven members of the Georgia AI Response Team. The email contains an attached voice recording of the backyard owner's flock problems. One of the seven members will contact the backyard owner, gather pertinent information and complete the assessment form with the owner over the phone. The responder will then contact all members of the AI Response Team via email to let them know the actions that have been initiated for the flock (flock visit, testing, mortality observation only, etc.).

**Georgia backyard flock owners calling into the USDA hotline are diverted to the Georgia AI Hotline.** If the owner calls during regular business hours, the Regional USDA Center provides the Georgia AI Hotline number to the caller. If the call to the USDA Center is made after regular business hours or during the weekend, the USDA hotline system automatically detects the backyard flock owner's state of occupancy (by the phone number) and directs the call to the USDA regional center representing Georgia. The regional center connects the caller to the Georgia AI Hotline number. Once connected, the call will be processed as described above.

**Backyard owner calls to the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) are diverted to the Georgia AI Hotline.** During business hours, the Hotline number is provided to the backyard owner by GDA supervisors and field inspectors. After hours and weekend calls are captured via email by the supervisors and inspectors and the email is forwarded to the Georgia AI Hotline email system to be processed as described above. The emails provided by GDA include a voicemail attachment of owner contact information and a short description of problems seen in the flock.

**County Extension Agents are assisting Georgia in the assessment of suspect AI backyard flocks.** When backyard flock owners call their local extension agent to report flock problems, the agent gathers important details about the flock and asks the caller questions on the AI Assessment form. The agent will then call the Georgia AI Hotline to initiate the Georgia response if the scores are above threshold values. The agent can include the assessment form as an attachment in an email to the Georgia AI Hotline Response Team. If assessment scores are less than threshold values, the owner is encouraged to call the main Gainesville laboratory number at 770-766-6810 during business hours.

Summary: GPLN is working closely with colleagues at USDA, GDA, University of Georgia Poultry Science Department and the Georgia County Extension Services to make sure AI suspicious flocks in Georgia are evaluated quickly and that "AI Negative" determinations are made without delay. Undoubtedly, the enhanced scrutiny of backyard flocks that has occurred over the last few months since the initiation of the AI Hotline system will generate many false alarms for AI infections. However, the Georgia Poultry Industry must accurately evaluate any and all flocks that have symptoms consistent with AIV infection. The "ALL IN or ALL GONE" theme not only applies to commercial companies accelerating their biosecurity practices to prevent AI, but could also be used to describe Georgia's accelerated efforts to evaluate and diagnose AI (if it exists) in any and all Georgia flocks including backyard flocks. The Georgia AI Hotline number was activated a month ago and the Hotline system has processed and evaluated 4 backyard flocks. All have been determined negative for AI infections.



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## GA Preparations for Avian Influenza

The state of Georgia has been preparing for LPAI for about 10 years, but has enhanced its effort in preparations, prevention, and response to Avian Influenza during the past 5 to 6 months due to current events.

### PREPARATIONS:

Part of our preparations have been outreach to poultry servicemen and growers, and also backyard poultry through grower and community meetings, social media and traditional media. We can think of nothing more important right now than to inform the interested parties of this threat.

During these meetings, the emphasis is on explaining where the virus comes from, recognizing the signs, outlining the response and the importance of the quick response, the role of poultry growers in the response, and prevention and biosecurity.

Our new inspector General with GDA, Gary Kelley, has visited every GEMA region and explained the influenza threat to all of them; they will be a great resource and are fully aware of the problem.

Other groups have been reached out to also such as landfill associations, renderers, local governments, fire departments, law enforcement, services to the poultry farms, etc.

He has also been preparing contracts and identifying resources we will need, among other things.

As far as state agencies involved and engaged, we have GDA of course as the primary responsible agency, GEMA, USDA, EPD, DNR, Public Health, the Office of the Governor. Other groups actively involved are The GA Poultry Federation, the Diagnostic Laboratories and UGA. Our Commissioner and state veterinarian have been personally involved in the preparations and fully supportive. We are lucky in Georgia to have all of those strong relationships and full support.

The response team has been meeting weekly for 6 months to enhance GA's preparations; GDA has trained many of its responders in the Incident Command System; We now have a fully functional state ICS team. Other training have included Carcass Disposal, EMRS, and Biosecurity.

### PREVENTION

During meetings, enhancement of biosecurity on Georgia farms is discussed in detail. The concept of the contamination being present potentially around the houses as opposed to outside the premises is explained. The importance of entry biosecurity is emphasized. Separating the outside from the inside with foot pans, disposable or dedicated boots is encouraged and implemented by the companies. The Georgia Poultry Federation Biosecurity Campaign now in full motion further supports the biosecurity message to growers.

### SUMMARY OF RESPONSE

The state of Georgia now has a fully functional ICS team, prepared, along with industry, to respond very quickly after a diagnosis. A 6 mile radius zone will be drawn around the case. The affected flock will be depopulated within 24 hours of the diagnosis, and disposed of by approved methods. The premise will then be cleaned and disinfected, and tested for virus before repopulation. While these activities take place, teams will be monitoring all commercial flocks within the 6 mile Zone, and other will be identifying and testing backyard flocks. After a short no movement period following a diagnosis, in the interest of continuation of business, product and birds will start moving under permit safely after intensive testing.

Louise Dufour-Zavala