Chicken Farmers of Canada
Les Producteurs de poulet du Canada
1610 – 50 rue O'Connor Street
Ottawa, ON K1P 6L2

Egg Farmers of Canada
Les Producteurs d'œufs du Canada
21 rue Florence Street
Ottawa, ON K2P 0W6

Turkey Farmers of Canada
Les Éleveurs de dindon du Canada
202 – 7145 avenue W Credit Avenue
Mississauga, ON L5N 6J7

Canadian Hatching Egg Producers
Les Producteurs d'œufs d'incubation du Canada
21 rue Florence Street
Ottawa, ON K2P 0W6

Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council
Conseil canadien des transformateurs d'œufs et de volailles
1400-1 rue Nicholas Street,
Ottawa, ON K1N 7B7

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Vaccination

Frequently Asked Questions

With HPAI cases across the globe, the conversation around the use of HPAI vaccines has been intensifying. This FAQ is intended to provide some context to the HPAI vaccination discussion in Canada. While this information represents the current context, this is a rapidly developing area, and the response could change accordingly.

Why can't we use HPAI vaccines like regular vaccines?

Implementing a HPAI vaccination program is complex, and considerations include vaccine efficacy and availability, logistics, surveillance, costs, and potential trade implications. The issue is that unlike other diseases, HPAI is a reportable disease and as such Canada needs to abide by international standards and expectations from importing countries.

Are there HPAI vaccines approved in Canada?

Yes, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has conditionally licensed 3 avian influenza vaccines:

- Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health – for use at the hatchery, 21-day withdrawal
- Ceva Animal Health – for use at the hatchery, 21-day withdrawal
- Zoetis – for use at the pullet stage, requires a booster, 42-day withdrawal

These vaccines are restricted to government sanctioned programs and can only be used with the authorization of CFIA.

These vaccines are currently only approved for the use in chickens. Further studies to confirm efficacy in turkeys and ducks are underway.

Where would HPAI vaccines be used?

HPAI vaccines are not for routine use. Any use of HPAI vaccines would be in a targeted manner in high-risk regions with high-risk species. A preventive HPAI vaccination program would be targeted to the most limited region necessary. Any HPAI vaccination program would need to be approved and overseen by the CFIA. Targeted species would include longer-lived birds and high-risk sectors (layers, broiler breeders, turkeys, ducks). Broiler chickens are not currently being discussed as a target for HPAI vaccination.

Are vaccines THE solution?

Vaccines are only one part of an integrated program of biosecurity, surveillance and stamping-out.

HPAI vaccines work by increasing a birds' resistance to becoming infected; therefore, reducing the number of birds that would become infected. Secondly, they work by decreasing the amount of virus that is shed into the environment by infected birds. Both help to reduce the spread of the virus. They can also reduce clinical signs of disease.

The performance and effectiveness of the vaccination will need to be monitored through surveillance.

Even with vaccine use, biosecurity remains an integral component of disease mitigation to keep HPAI out of the barn. All infected flocks need to be part of the stamping-out policy, regardless of if they are vaccinated or not.

Why is surveillance of HPAI vaccinated flocks necessary?

International standards via the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) require surveillance of vaccinated flocks. Even when vaccines are used, there is the possibility that vaccinated flocks may become infected but exhibit few to no clinical signs but still shed and transmit the virus. For this reason, surveillance programs are used to ensure there are no cases of active infection and to establish credibility with trading partners that active HPAI infections are being stamped-out. One consideration in choosing a vaccine is that is must be DIVA-compliant (Differentiating Infected from Vaccinated Animals) so that vaccinated and infected flocks can be identified properly.

Surveillance measures have proven to be the most expensive element of an HPAI vaccination program. Currently, the European surveillance plan is considered to be the international gold standard to accompany an HPAI vaccination plan. In France, the HPAI surveillance programs have passive and active surveillance including weekly dead bird surveillance swabs taken by farmers or technicians, and monthly swabs and blood samples by veterinarians and a clinical examination. Given the cost and field experiences to date, the extent of their surveillance program has been altered over time with a shift to more passive surveillance with dead bird sampling.

Why are there trade implications when using HPAI vaccination?

Trade remains the most significant barrier to HPAI vaccination world-wide. The issue is the risk that importing countries could impose trade barriers—like extra regulations—on poultry products and genetics. While international standards from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) do allow HPAI vaccination in some cases, each country that imports our products can set its own rules and may require its own risk assessment to ensure the products are safe before allowing them in.

The animal health concern is that “silent infections” could be circulating amongst vaccinated poultry, and that HPAI viruses could be circulated via trade. This is the reason that effective traceability, surveillance and stamping-out programs are required to provide confidence to importing countries. In most cases, vaccinated flocks and poultry products are only allowed to be used domestically.

Are there international experiences with HPAI vaccination?

Yes, there have been recent HPAI vaccination pilots and programs, most notably in France and the Netherlands. France, after successful trials, launched a mandatory HPAI vaccination program in October 2023 for all fattening ducks. In 2023/24 France vaccinated 61 million ducks at a reported cost of over $100 million Euros for the first 12 months, with the cost shared between government and industry. France’s vaccination program continues to be implemented and has shown good results; while there were over 400 cases the year prior to implementation, **there were only 10 cases in 2023/24**. France did experience trade implications upon beginning their HPAI vaccination program. For example, Canada and the US implemented bans on all poultry imports until further assessments could be conducted. Trade of poultry and poultry products from unvaccinated flocks resumed in early 2025.

The Netherlands is conducting an HPAI vaccination field trial to assess the effectiveness of vaccination on layer flocks. This trial conducted on one commercial flock, which will run through 2027, will evaluate the protection of HPAI vaccination, provide practical experience with surveillance and will help determine future vaccination programming. All vaccinated products will only be used domestically (i.e. will not be exported).

What conversations has Canada been having on HPAI vaccination?

The HPAI Vaccination Task Force, in place since June 2023, is a joint industry, cross government and academic task force that considers the veterinary, scientific, economic and practical implications of a vaccination policy in Canada. It serves as a useful tool for information sharing and discussion and has achieved several outcomes, including the cost benefit analysis of HPAI vaccination in the Fraser Valley.

How does Canada move forward to allowing the use of HPAI vaccination?

As seen in France and the Netherlands, field trials can be useful to assess the efficacy, feasibility, and economics of incorporating vaccination into Canada's broader HPAI response framework. The results of field trials can then be used to develop confidence of trading partners as decisions are made on implementing an HPAI vaccination program.