

Temporary suspension of bird gatherings will be lifted from 15 May

The temporary suspension was introduced in December 2016 after the declaration of the whole of Wales as an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone. This followed the confirmation of the H5N8 strain of Avian Influenza across European countries, the Middle East and North Africa.

Last week, the Cabinet Secretary confirmed the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone would not be replaced after its expiry on 30 April. The temporary suspension on gatherings of some species of birds in Wales, however, remained.

The lifting of the temporary suspension, from 15 May, follows an updated evidence-based risk assessment and is dependent on no further outbreaks of H5N8 in poultry or other captive birds or findings in wild birds.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“I have taken this decision based upon the latest qualitative risk assessment, which considered the risk of incursion of H5N8 into poultry farms from contact primarily with resident wild waterfowl, but also with other possible pathways.

“The updated assessment concluded the overall risk should now be assessed as low, this is defined as being ‘rare, but may occur occasionally’. The overall risk is determined by the likelihood of the virus remaining in wild birds and the environment and the exposure to poultry.

“Expert opinion is that the risk to poultry is reduced as migratory wild birds leave Great Britain and as the resident wild waterfowl enters its breeding season. Environmental contamination will also reduce with warmer, drier weather and higher UV levels. Therefore, the risk of exposure to poultry is low as the resident wild waterfowl enters the breeding season they become less gregarious and the possibility of environmental contamination reduces.

“The overall risk presented by gatherings is also reduced, provided there are high levels of biosecurity at the gathering, ensuring species do not mix and cleansing and disinfection is carried out.

“Provided there are no further outbreaks or findings, the current general licence will be revoked and replaced on 15 May by a new general licence allowing all gatherings of birds.”

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop added:

“While I am sure this news will be welcomed by poultry and other captive bird keepers I would remind them it is vital they remain vigilant for signs of disease and maintain excellent biosecurity practices.”