Maryland

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Implementing a Mandatory Milk Testing Program for Maryland Dairies: FAQ's

Why should the dairy industry be concerned about Influenza A?

Influenza A, including highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), has been detected in dairy cattle in several other states. While the disease is not usually fatal in dairy cattle, it has significant impacts for affected farms, animals, and industries. Dairy cattle that have tested positive for the virus have decreased milk production, and some have become seriously ill. The virus can put a substantial burden on farm operations and cause significant losses. Maryland is home to many dairy farms and commercial poultry operations. These farms are highly susceptible to Influenza A because the virus can spread easily between animals and farms, particularly if biosecurity practices are not followed consistently. Additionally, an outbreak on one farm puts the entire industry at risk, especially for farms that share business relationships and resources.

How does the Influenza A virus spread?

The Influenza A virus was first introduced into a dairy herd in the Southwestern US by infected wild birds. Since then, all transmission of the virus in dairy cattle has been from cow-to-cow spread, due in part to the movement of lactating dairy cows, contaminated equipment, and people between farms not properly following or implementing biosecurity practices. Trucks, farm equipment, clothing, footwear, tools, and people can all transport the virus. This means strict biosecurity protocols must be followed. A biosecurity plan should include wearing a designated pair of boots when working around animals, using a footbath with disinfectant after cleaning boots, cleaning equipment properly, and spraying disinfectant on vehicle and trailer tires before returning to the farm.

Why are MDA and MDH implementing mandatory milk testing?

Maryland continues to monitor the spread of cases of HPAI in dairy cattle across the United States. Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and Maryland Department of Health (MDH) are implementing mandatory milk testing, at the farm bulk tank level, to determine if Influenza A/HPAI is circulating in lactating dairy cattle throughout Maryland. Given the virus' ability to be transmitted between dairy cattle and poultry, Maryland is being proactive to safeguard both industries from potentially devastating losses by providing no-cost testing. In other states that have not established proactive testing protocols, HPAI has spread rapidly, caused economic

losses and significant mortality of animals, and even if testing protocols were put in place afterwards, the virus had already caused significant damage.

What are the requirements for the no-cost mandatory testing?
Mandatory testing strategies have been developed to sample bulk tank raw milk from all dairy farms in Maryland. These include dairies that ship raw milk via their cooperative to a processor, on-farm producers/processors, and pet food (raw milk) dairies (both lactating dairy cattle and lactating dairy goats). The requirements are different for different categories of producers:

- Dairies that ship to large in-state processors will have their milk collected by the bulk milk hauler/sampler and submitted by the processor every 14 days
- On-farm producers/processors will have bulk tank samples collected every 30 days by staff of the Maryland Department of Health.
- Dairies that ship to out of state processors (other than single-load producers, who are covered in the next bullet) will have their milk collected by the bulk milk hauler/sampler and submitted by the processor every 14 days
- Single-load dairy producers (a farm that sends an entire tanker to an out-of-state processor) will send a sample collected by the bulk milk hauler/sampler directly to the Salisbury Animal Health Laboratory every 14 days.
- Pet food (raw milk) dairies will have bulk tank samples collected every 14 days by the Maryland Department of Agriculture.

Sampling supplies including submission forms, shipping labels, packaging materials and tubes will be provided at no-cost by the MDA and the USDA. For more details regarding testing, visit www.mda.maryland.gov or call the Animal Health Program at 410-841-5810.

What happens if a positive test or non-negative result is reported?
If Influenza A is identified on a dairy farm through testing MDA will notify the farm, establish and post an Order of Special Quarantine at that farm, identify the farm as an infected premise, and establish an Infected Zone of three kilometers surrounding that farm.

Although the farm will be under an Order of Special Quarantine, the producer will be allowed to ship milk with a permit from MDA, while meeting biosecurity standards. MDA will work with the producer to maintain continuity of business while reducing the risk of spreading the Influenza A virus to any other farms.

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) will work with MDA to ensure that any farm staff exposed to HPAI A(H5N1)-infected animals/environment (including people wearing recommended PPE) are monitored for signs and symptoms of respiratory illness beginning after

their first exposure and for 10 days after their last exposure. MDH will also ensure access to seasonal flu vaccination, influenza testing, and post-exposure prophylaxis (antivirals) for exposed farm workers.

Because pasteurization has been shown to effectively kill the influenza A virus, raw milk that tests positive does not represent a public health threat after it is properly pasteurized. MDA and MDH are working together so that infected animals and unpasteurized (raw) milk do not cause infections in either humans or pets.

Where should milk samples be sent for testing?
Samples should be shipped overnight or hand-delivered to:

Salisbury Animal Health Laboratory
27722 Nanticoke RD, Unit 3
Salisbury, MD 21801

Visit www.mda.maryland.gov for submission forms and details on supplies, packaging and shipping. All supplies needed for sampling/testing are provided at no cost by the MDA and the USDA.

What if I don't have, or don't know my USDA-issued Premises ID Number?
If you do not have a USDA-issued premise ID number, you can enroll by contacting the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Animal Health Program at 410-841-5810 or using the Premises Registration Form available on the MDA website.

If you have a number but don't know it, you can find that information by contacting the MDA Animal Health at 410-841-5810.

How long will mandatory testing be required?
We hope that this testing lasts only a short amount of time and never results in a positive result, but this is an emerging disease in dairy cattle with many unknowns. The program will continue as long as it remains necessary. Testing will help MDA, MDH, industry, animal, and public health stakeholders further understand and control the spread of the disease.

What does mandatory testing cost?
There is no cost to farmers, processors, or consumers for the testing. All supplies for participation will be provided by either MDA or USDA. Funding for HPAI testing is provided by the USDA.

How will positive test results be confirmed?
Testing used for Influenza A in approved labs is highly accurate and specific. Positive tests will be confirmed at the National Veterinary Service Laboratory (NVSL) and through additional

investigation. In the unlikely event of a false positive test, follow up confirmatory testing will determine the true Influenza A status quickly and efficiently.

I am a dairy producer—what signs should I watch for in my dairy herd?
Clinical signs in dairy cattle include a decrease in feed consumption, with a simultaneous decrease in rumination and rumen motility; respiratory signs including clear nasal discharge; and subsequent acute drop in milk production. Additional clinical signs may include abnormal tacky or loose feces, lethargy, dehydration, and fever. Severely affected cattle may have thicker, concentrated, colostrum-like milk or produce no milk at all.

Any dairy cow showing clinical illness should be immediately separated from the rest of the herd. Contact your veterinarian and notify MDA immediately. Milk from dairy cattle that are sick or producing abnormal milk should not enter the food supply chain and these animals should be milked separately from the rest of the herd. There are several options for how to treat the milk from infected cattle for disposal, such as on-farm pasteurization. However, each case will need to be handled individually and staff from the MDA Animal Health Program will work with dairy producers to determine protocols that will work for their individual circumstances.

I want to be proactive at a farm-level and test my own herd. What can I do?
You can voluntarily test your herd or any suspect cattle. Testing will be performed at no cost to producers, and MDA or USDA will provide necessary sampling supplies upon request. For more information, please visit the MDA website at www.mda.maryland.gov.

What if I have poultry or other species on my farm?
The Influenza A virus is easily spread to and deadly to poultry. It has also been confirmed in other livestock such as swine and alpacas. Strict biosecurity remains the most effective means of preventing the spread of Influenza A from one farm to another. If you have more than one species of animals on your premises, treat these areas as separate premises and implement best biosecurity practices between them. Additional information is available through MDA at www.mda.maryland.gov or USDA at www.aphis.usda.gov.

What resources are available if Influenza A is detected on a dairy farm?
The USDA has several resources available for producers who have been impacted by an Influenza A detection on their farm. That includes helping producers pay for heat treatment of milk, the purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE), and financial assistance for dairy farmers who have seen a loss of production. More information about USDA resources can be found at www.aphis.usda.gov

Where can I find current and reliable information on HPAI and Influenza A?
Information regarding HPAI and influenza A can be found online at:

Maryland Department of Health Avian Influenza Website

Maryland Department of Health Center for Milk and Dairy Product Safety Website

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) H5 Bird Flu Website

USDA HPAI Website

Does Maryland have the testing capacity to handle this new mandatory testing?
Yes. The Salisbury Animal Health Laboratory (SAHL) is equipped to handle the increased testing that will result from mandatory testing.

Is pasteurized milk safe to consume?
Yes. The FDA has demonstrated that pasteurization kills the Influenza A virus, so pasteurized milk or other dairy products remain safe to consume. The FDA recommends consuming pasteurized milk and dairy products.

I have more questions. Where can I get answers?

- The official Testing Order can be found online at mda.maryland.gov or by contacting the MDA Animal Health at 410-841-5810.

- Questions regarding the Testing Order may be directed to the Animal Health Program, Maryland Department of Agriculture, 50 Harry S Truman Parkway, Annapolis, MD 21401 or by telephone at 410-841-5810, or by email at MD.DairyHPAI@maryland.gov.

- Questions about biosecurity plans can be addressed to the Department at MD.DairyHPAI@maryland.gov or 410-841-5810.

- To secure your official federal premises identification, visit the Maryland Department of Agriculture Premises Registration Form – mda.maryland.gov or contact the Department at 410-841-5810.