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Answer given by Mr Várhelyi
on behalf of the European Commission
(21.3.2025)

The H5N1 influenza virus circulating in the United States (US) has not been detected in humans or cattle in the EU.

The Commission prepares for the threat represented by the H5N1 circulation viruses in mammals. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the EU Reference Laboratory for avian influenza (EURL) closely monitor the situation and changes in the virus through surveillance in animals and humans and publish regularly scientific reports¹.

The ECDC assesses the risk from the H5N1 viruses as low for the general population and low-to-moderate for those exposed to infected or dead animals².

The Union Surveillance Programme for avian influenza³ requires Member States to perform surveillance in wild or kept mammals when the epidemiological situation indicates that they may constitute a risk for animal and human health. Such surveillance must be performed in accordance with the guidance issued by the EURL⁴, including milk sampling.

EU legislation for animal health⁵ provides for the measures to be taken by the Member States if Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza viruses were detected in kept mammalian animals.

To strengthen cross-border coordination, the Commission organised an avian influenza simulation exercise for human and animal health experts from Member States. The ECDC and EFSA have assessed the potential of these viruses⁶ to spread to humans, made recommendations for the animal and public health sectors, and published a guidance on investigation of avian influenza outbreaks⁷.

The Commission has requested the EFSA and EURL to assess the risk of infection of dairy cows in the EU with the virus circulating in the US to explore actions in animals⁸.

¹ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/avian-influenza#published-on-this-topic>

² <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/infectious-disease-topics/z-disease-list/avian-influenza/threats-and-outbreaks/risk-assessment-h5#:~:text=The%20risk%20for%20occupationally%20or,considered%20to%20be%20very%20low>

³ http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2020/689/2023-10-11

⁴ <https://www.izsvenezie.com/documents/reference-laboratories/avian-influenza/useful-resources/guidance-representative-genomic-avian-influenza-virus.pdf>
<https://www.izsvenezie.com/documents/reference-laboratories/avian-influenza/diagnostic-protocols/guidelines-diagnosis-h5n1-cattle.pdf>

⁵ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/429/oj>

⁶ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/avian-influenza-eu-agencies-track-virus-mutations-and-analyse-response-strategies>

⁷ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/9183>

⁸ <https://open.efsa.europa.eu/questions/EFSA-Q-2024-00712>