SOUTH AFRICAN POULTRY ASSOCIATION
Founded 1904

REPORT ON AVIAN INFLUENZA (AI)

SURVEILLANCE MONITORING FOR THE SURVEILLANCE PERIOD

January to March 2026

(1Q2026)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Summary of WOAH report to end March 2026

Since its inception in China in 1996, there have been multiple waves of intercontinental transmission of the H5Nx Gs/GD lineage HPAI virus. In poultry the HPAI H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b strain predominates.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreaks are reported by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) in a cycle starting in October and ending in September. Table 1 below is taken from the 80th situation report of the WOAH, covering the period to the end of February 2026. It shows the key figures for the current seasonal wave and the two previous waves. Given that the most recent period includes only 5 months, it looks like the number of outbreaks is likely to be high in the present period when compared to the previous two cycles.

Table 1: Global HPAI outbreaks reported to WOAH

	1 Oct 2023 - 30 Sep 2024	1 Oct 2024 - 30 Sep 2025	1 Oct 2025 - 28 Feb 2026
Poultry			
Countries and territories	39	50	38
Outbreaks	851	1 410	1147
Wild birds			
Countries and territories	55	55	47
Outbreaks	1 076	1 912	5996

Outbreaks in the northern hemisphere continue to follow a strongly seasonal pattern with a winter peak (Figure 1). Data from the southern hemisphere is so limited that no patterns emerge.

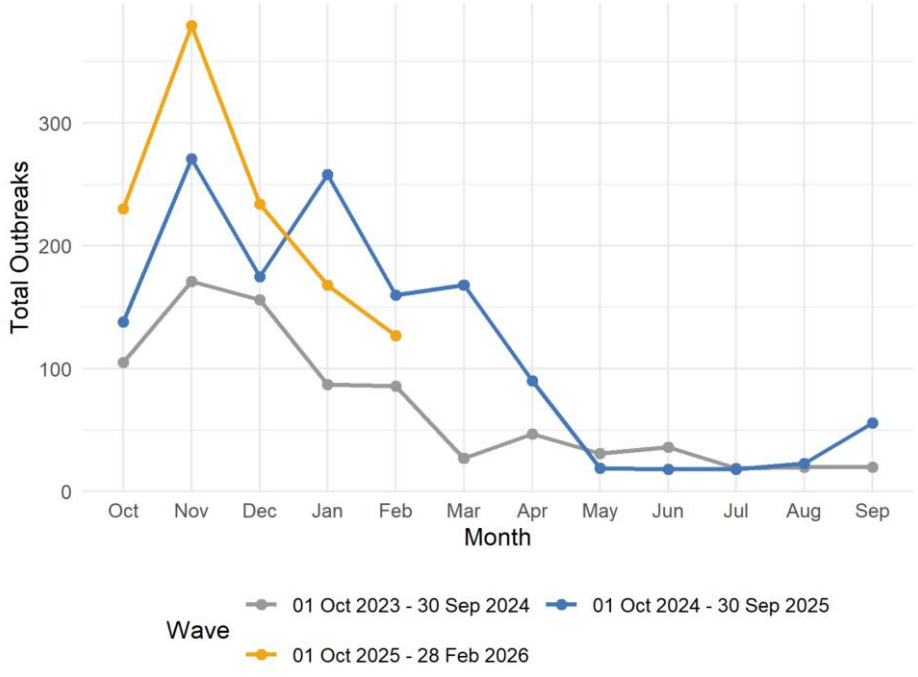

Figure 1: HPAI outbreaks in the northern hemisphere

Suspected cases of HPAI are reported from Antarctica and the subantarctic islands affecting Gentoo penguins, giant petrels and elephant and fur seals.

1.2. Africa situation

Nigeria is the only African country reporting active avian influenza cases in the first 3 months of 2026. The present HPAI outbreak in Nigeria started in mid-October 2025 is caused by H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b viruses with a total of 29 cases reported to date. Most outbreaks are on small farms with fewer than 100 birds although there are indications that bigger flocks of 5 000 to 13 000 have also been affected. Total losses are very hard to determine but are probably between 20 000 and 50 000 since October 2025. Cases have been reported from widely separated regions across Nigeria and are ongoing in April 2026. This is a concern for South Africa as a number of AI isolates from previous outbreaks in South Africa have shown recent common ancestors in Nigeria.

1.3. South Africa

No new cases of avian influenza have been reported in South Africa in 2026.

1.4. HPAI vaccination

HPAI vaccination has been carried out in place at a small number of broiler breeder farm complexes using the existing HPAI vaccination protocol.

No discussions have been held between the Director of Animal Health and the SAPA task team in the past year. The industry has completed an application to have the present vaccination protocol reviewed and has also submitted an alternative proposal for HPAI vaccination in South Africa. We await the response from the Department of Agriculture.

1.5. Low pathogenicity avian influenza – H9N2 strain

No new cases of H9N2 have been reported in Southern Africa since the report in Mozambique in August 2025. This virus had Middle Eastern origins. H9N2 viruses were reported in Senegal since December 2025. H9N2 viruses are showing an enhanced ability to infect human cells and have been identified as having ‘pandemic potential’. They pose a potential risk for South African poultry.

2. RESULTS OF AI SURVEILLANCE MONITORING

2.1. Reported HPAI outbreaks

Two outbreaks of H5N1 were reported towards the end of June 2025 in broiler breeder flocks, in the provinces of Mpumalanga and North West.

In the third quarter, a further 7 outbreaks occurred in domestic birds in Eastern Cape (1), Mpumalanga (2) and Western Cape (4), bringing the total number of outbreaks to 9.

To date, 4 broiler breeder and 3 commercial layer units have been affected. The estimated number of culls is indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Birds culled per province			
Province	Broiler breeders	Commercial layers	Total
E. Cape	9 883		9 883
Free State			0
Gauteng			0
KwaZulu-Natal			0
Limpopo			0
Mpumalanga	72 000	280 000	352 000
North West	200 000		200 000
N. Cape			0
W. Cape	15 400	160 000	175 400
National	**297 283**	**440 000**	**737 283**

According to the Department of Agriculture, 11 outbreaks were reported in poultry. These occurred in Eastern Cape (1), Mpumalanga (3), North West (1) and Western Cape (6) (source: *Avian Influenza: H5 and H7 outbreak update report*, 31 March 2026). Six of the outbreaks were resolved by the date of publication; 3 in Western Cape, 2 in Mpumalanga and 1 in Eastern Cape.

There were also 33 outbreaks of H5 in wild birds and 9 in backyard operations (Table 3).

Table 3: Categorical breakdown of HPAI H5 outbreaks per province (source: DoA)				
Province	Commercial poultry	Backyard	Wild birds	Total
E. Cape	1		4	5
Free State				0
Gauteng			1	1
KZN				0
Limpopo			1	1
Mpumal.	3	1		4
N. West	1			1
N. Cape				0
W. Cape	6	8	27	41
Total cases	**11**	**9**	**33**	**53**

2.2. Temporal and spatial distribution of the HPAI H5N1 outbreaks in South Africa

Figures 2-5 show the epidemic curves per farm type, enterprise type, province and municipality, for the five-week period from 21 June to 30 September 2025.

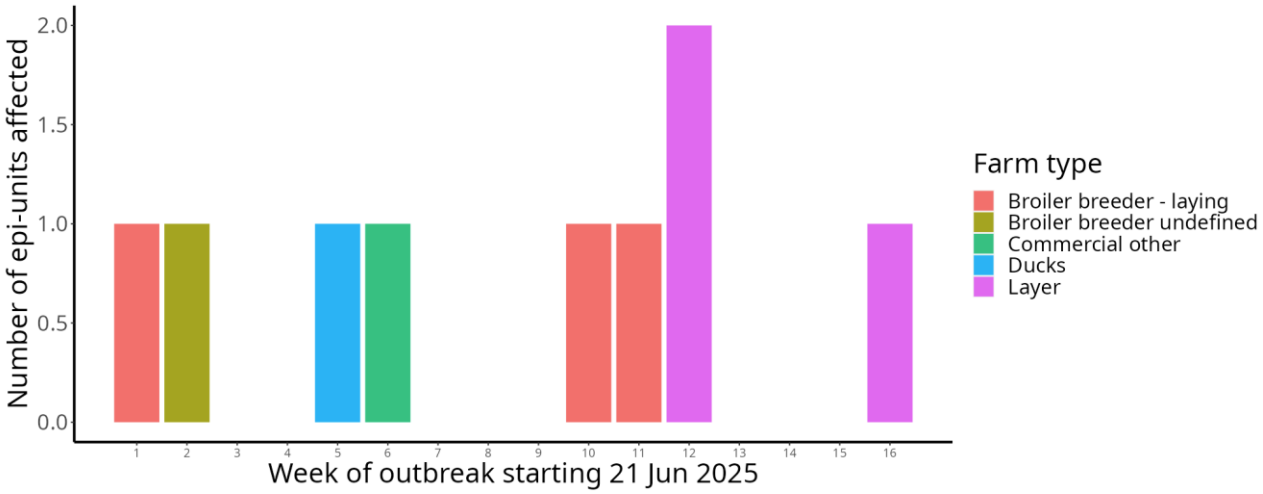

Figure 2: H5N1 epidemic curve classified according to farm type (21 Jun – 30 Sep 2025)

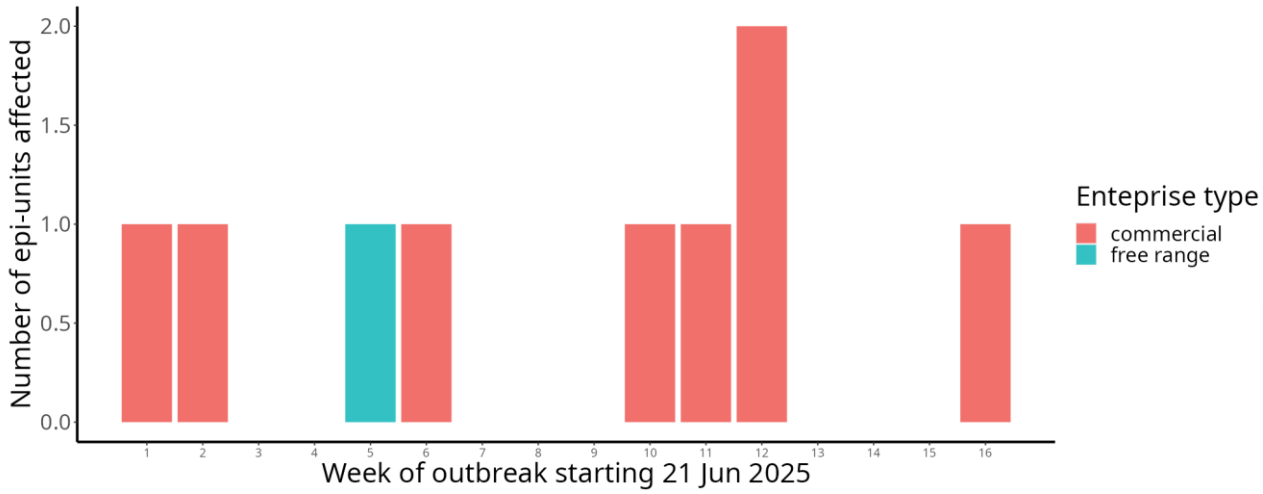

Figure 3: H5N1 epidemic curve classified according to enterprise type (21 Jun – 30 Sep 2025)

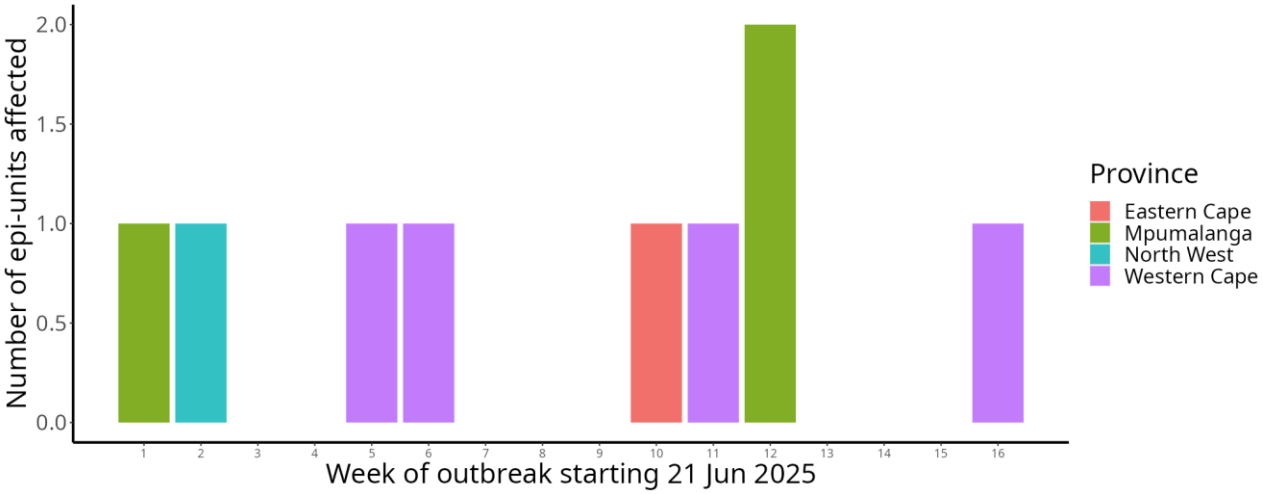

Figure 4: H5N1 epidemic curve classified according to province (21 Jun – 30 Sep 2025)

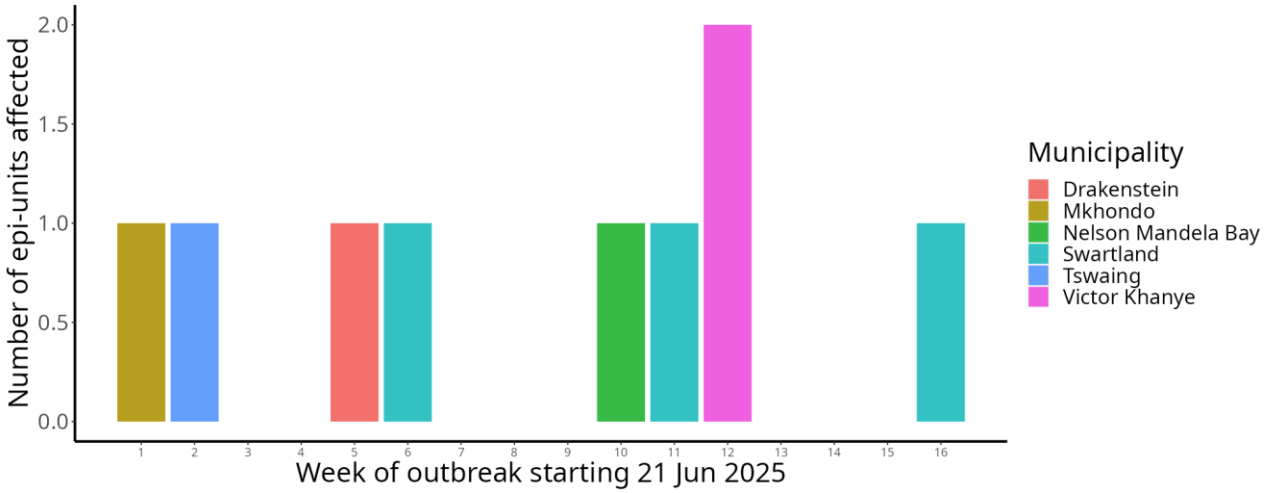

Figure 5: H5N1 epidemic curve classified according to municipality (21 Jun – 30 Sep 2025)

Figures 6 and 7 show the outbreak density and spread respectively. The first outbreak occurred in Mpumalanga, and the most recent in Western Cape.

Figure 6: H5N1 outbreak density (21 Jun – 30 Sep 2025)

Figure 7: **H5N1 outbreak spread (21 Jun – 30 Sep 2025)**

2.3. AI surveillance programme

Table 4 summarises the AI test results of farms that submitted data during the reporting period. The total number of samples tested decreased from 38 150 in 4Q2025 to 36 312. These figures change from time to time due to ongoing submissions of data. The number of broiler industry farms submitting samples decreased from 308 to 284, while the number of egg industry farms submitting samples decreased from 26 to 12. Of the samples tested during 1Q2026, 34 (0.1%) were positive.

Table 4: AI test results

PROVINCE	FARM TYPE		SAMPLES		
	Broiler industry	Egg industry	Tested	Positive (ELISA)	Negative
Eastern Cape	31	0	2 666	0	2 666
Free State	40	0	6 734	0	6 734
Gauteng	18	3	3 120	7	3 113
KwaZulu-Natal	57	1	7 142	19	7 123
Limpopo	22	1	1 883	1	1 882
Mpumalanga	19	1	3 778	7	3 771
North West	68	6	9 004	0	9 004
Northern Cape	1	0	60	0	60
Western Cape	28	0	1 925	0	1 925
National	**284**	**12**	**36 312**	**34**	**36 278**

A positive ELISA test does not necessarily indicate a true outbreak. All ELISA results must be verified using haemagglutination inhibition (HI) testing which also confirms which strain of AI is involved. Further

confirmation is done using PCR, molecular sequencing and on occasion, virus isolation. False positive results on the ELISA test may run at about 1–2%.

Table 5 gives a breakdown of the number of chicken farms that participated in the AI surveillance monitoring during the quarter under review.

Table 5: Number of farms that participated	
Broiler industry	
GGP and grandparent farms	17
Parent rearing farms	42
Broiler breeder farms	75
Broiler rearing farms	150
TOTAL	284
Egg industry	
Grandparent farms	1
Parent rearing farms	0
Layer breeder farms	5
Pullet rearing farms	6
Layers (table egg production)	0
TOTAL	12
BROILER AND EGG INDUSTRIES	**296**

Table 6 indicates the total number of farms that did not participate during the quarter under review. Farms that are not exporting are only required to submit samples twice a year.

Table 6: Number of farms that did not submit AI test results		
PROVINCE	**FARM TYPE**	
	Broiler industry	**Egg industry**
Eastern Cape	11	12
Free State	14	35
Gauteng	67	54
KwaZulu-Natal	41	38
Limpopo	12	23
Mpumalanga	113	26
North West	75	39
Northern Cape	1	5
Western Cape	77	38
National	**411**	**270**

Figure 8 shows the density of chicken farms weighted according to the number of birds on each farm. The heat map has been generated by specifying that an area be coloured according to the vicinity of neighbouring farms within a 20 km radius. The purpose of this map is to identify potential hotspots where the possibility for transmission of the avian influenza virus is higher. The relative risk of transmission is low in the green areas, moderate in the yellow areas and high in the red areas.

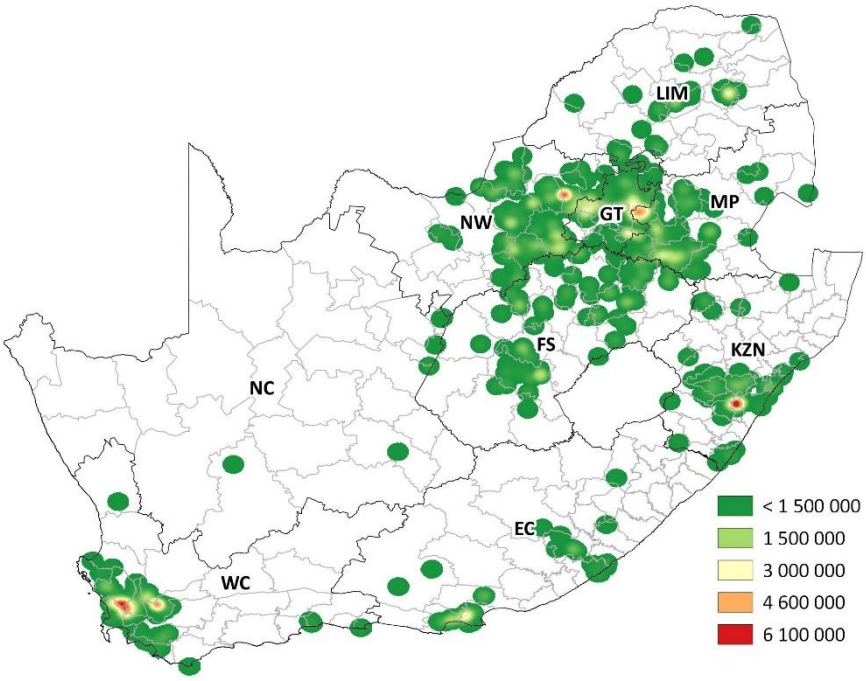

Figure 8: Heat map illustrating the density of chicken farms

3. AVIAN INFLUENZA MONITORING IN SOUTH AFRICA

SAPA is an active participant in the surveillance monitoring process for avian influenza in the national poultry flock. Surveillance is conducted on a monthly basis for ZA compartments (export facilities) and on a six-monthly basis for non-ZA compartments, according to a prescribed protocol. All producers are encouraged to participate in this programme.

Producers are requested to ensure that the **AI monitoring database update input sheet** is filled in accurately with every submission. Of particular importance are:

- the geographical location (gps coordinates) of the farm;
- the type of poultry; and
- the average number of chickens currently on the farm.

Silverpath Consulting continues to focus on improving the quality of the information in the AI database.

4. CONCLUSION

Although no new cases of HPAI were reported in South Africa in 1Q2026, the disease remains a risk to producers. In the absence of widespread vaccine administration, tight biosecurity and controlled movement of birds are advised.

5. SAPA CONTACT DETAILS

Silverpath Consulting is contracted to SAPA to collate the information regarding avian influenza and thus to contact poultry farmers in order to solicit the required information. Ms Idah Mosweu conducts these surveys and we request the industry to cooperate with the process. She can be contacted on the cell phone

number 078 951 6937 or land line 011 794 1842 during working hours. Alternatively use the e-mail address: diseasereports@sapoultry.co.za.

Data collated by Silverpath Consulting
Report compiled by Leading Edge Poultry Software
Technical input provided by Dr Shahn Bisschop and Dr John Grewar