

STOCK QUOTES

Animal Health Newsletter

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Quarterly Newsletter from the Animal Health
Bureau of the Montana Department of Livestock
(MDOL)

STATE VETERINARIAN NOTES

Tahnee Szymanski, DVM

Emergency Preparedness: The winter months are filled with annual industry group meetings. DOL has had the opportunity to speak to several groups about large scale disease response and the Secure Food Supply plans. The 72-hour stop-movement that would occur with the detection of a Foreign Animal Disease such as African Swine Fever or Foot and Mouth Disease in the United States is of particular interest to industry groups.

USDA's baseline guidance is that susceptible animal shipments already in transit at the start of the standstill should continue to their destination. As these are planned movements, allowing them to continue should result in minimal additional disruption, whereas returning to the point-of-origin for some may present substantial logistic, biosecurity, and welfare challenges.

Depending on time of year, a substantial number of livestock may be in transit at the start of a standstill, including loads that are only passing through our state. As an example, a winter storm that closed Monida Pass on Interstate-15 last year had us scrambling to find a place for 30 plus loads of fed Canadian origin cattle in sealed trailers to offload as they waited for the road to reopen. We cannot be certain that all destinations will accept loads in transit, and we may be faced with the challenge of finding temporary locations to offload animals.

Regardless of external traffic, the challenges of implementing a standstill within Montana will be numerous, including how the directive will be communicated to industry, where to land loads that have no other outlet, and how to enforce a standstill statewide with the limited number of staff and resources that DOL has on hand. In the coming year, DOL is committed to advancing this discussion and will be looking to engage industry on creative solutions.

Avian Influenza: HPAI remains active on the landscape nationally with 105 infected flocks detected in the last 30 days nationally. Montana has just one detection during this time. While we are hopeful this is an indication that local risk is decreasing, we still advise that Montana poultry owners take precautions to reduce the risk of disease introduction.

Canine Respiratory Disease: Reports of increased numbers of severe respiratory disease have occurred across much of the US, including reports in Montana. While we do not believe the cause to be a novel pathogen, there is substantial discussion among infectious disease doctors about underlying factors that may be contributing to the apparent increase in case numbers and severity, see more information on page 3. In addition, a new program offered by USDA to determine the cause of Unusual Morbidity Events is available to veterinarians and is involved in this discussion, see page 6.

Warmest wishes for the holidays! Please remember to change the number in your tattoo pliers. α

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WHAT'S NEW

- The Stock Quotes format - We hope the transition is smooth for our readers.
- MDOL Regulatory Session at the MVMA Winter Meeting – January 2024

HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA (HPAI) UPDATE

Merry Michalski, DVM

Montana, along with the rest of the United States (US), enjoyed a summer largely free of HPAI in domestic poultry. However, with the fall migration of wild waterfowl, the infection rates have once again increased. Since the start of the outbreak over 64.2 million birds have been affected nationally, which includes over 164,600 domestic birds in Montana.

The ramp up in cases started again this October and infected premises have included Glacier, Flathead, Park, Sweet Grass, Wheatland, Missoula, and Lewis and Clark counties. A total of 24 total premises across 16 different counties have confirmed HPAI infection since the start of the outbreak in early 2022 (Figure 1). Commercial flocks that are affected are required to depopulate their remaining birds, undergo cleaning, disinfection, and environmental testing before they can restock. Many of the affected premises in Montana are backyard flocks with no sales of products. These premises can choose to monitor their remaining birds, however in most cases (especially chickens) the mortality rate is near 100%.

Department of Livestock (DOL) continues to encourage heightened biosecurity efforts and monitoring for abnormal mortalities and illness in poultry flocks.

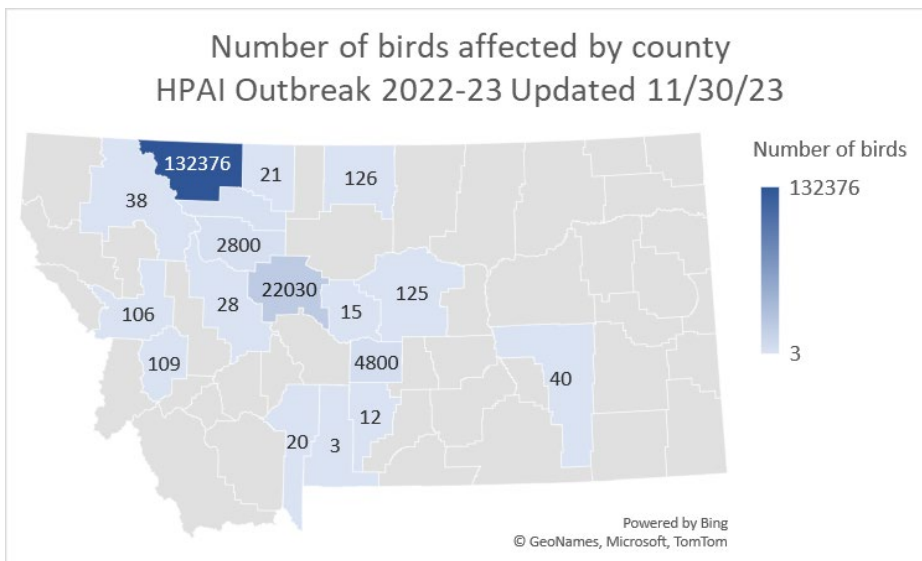


Figure 1. Number of Birds Affected by County. Source: AHB Staff

Interestingly, Montana had its first detection of HPAI in a domestic mammal in November. A stray kitten was found in the chicken coop of an infected premises in Missoula County. The kitten demonstrated upper respiratory signs and worsening neurologic symptoms: acutely blind, knuckling, and ataxia. Rabies testing was completed and negative. Given the location where the kitten was found and associated symptoms, HPAI testing was performed, and was confirmed. Transmission is suspected to be from ingestion of organic material in the chicken coop, which would have contained a high viral load.

The risk of HPAI transmission to domestic animals continues to be low. However, animals are at increased risk if they ingest infected domestic or wild birds or their bodily fluids. Stray or feral cats and dogs, hunting dogs, and outdoor only pets may be at increased risk given the possibility of finding and ingesting dead or sick birds. DOL's recommendation is to limit pet exposure to domestic poultry and wild birds, especially if the birds are sick or dead. ☒

CANINE RESPIRATORY ILLNESS

Merry Michalski, DVM

An increase in canine respiratory illness has been reported in dogs in several states, including Montana, and Canadian provinces with concern that the reported illness is a new or mysterious pathogen. While an underlying cause has not yet been determined, infectious disease experts state the disease pattern is not consistent with a new pathogen. Rather, the reported cases follow normal trends seen during this time of the year. The reported symptoms are also consistent with typical seasonal respiratory disease.

Another concern is the severity and duration of symptoms and a lack of response to standard treatments. Dogs present with coughing, inappetence, nasal discharge, lethargy, and fever. Some symptoms, such as the dry cough, tend to last weeks and in some cases have led to acute pneumonia. Theories as to why we are seeing an increase in canine respiratory disease cases and/or the change in response to typical treatments include:

- A new or changing pathogen.
- Infection with multiple pathogens concurrently.
- A decrease in client compliance with pet vaccinations resulting in less immune protection. This is a trend that has been observed in human medicine regarding feelings towards vaccinations.
- An increase in social exposure. People and pets are potentially traveling more after a long period of decreased travel.
- Media coverage of "mysterious" canine respiratory disease contributing to increased awareness and concern in dog owners. Clients that would not normally report mild respiratory symptoms to their veterinarian may schedule an exam because they do not want their pet to have the "mysterious" illness.

The Department of Livestock (DOL) encourages ongoing education of clients on how to protect their pets and minimize risk of exposure. For dogs that present with respiratory disease, DOL urges veterinarians to collect specimens from acute cases prior to treatment and store them until the clinical outcome is known. If the patient doesn't respond to treatment and initial diagnostics are negative, further testing of the original specimens can be done. For the most current information for veterinarians and clients DOL recommends the following:

- Worms & Germs Blog | Resources for Animals, Humans, & Infectious Disease | University of Guelph at wormsandgermsblog.com
- Respiratory Disease in Dogs: How Veterinarians Can Help | College of Veterinary Medicine at MSU at <https://bit.ly/3RPPA7m>
- Separating Fact, Fiction, and Uncertainty: Canine Respiratory Illness Q&A, a 1-hr Webinar from Infectious Disease Experts at <https://bit.ly/47axDVi> [a](#)

REIMBURSEMENT FOR SOFTWARE TO ENHANCE TRACEABILITY

Britta Sekora

For Category II Accredited Veterinarians, DOL continues to offer reimbursement of up to \$900 towards the purchase of various hardware items for electronic data capture. Eligible items include Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) readers, microchip readers, laptops, printers, tablets, and other mobile devices. If you are interested in a stationary reader for your practice or at a Montana livestock market, additional funding may be available.

DOL is happy to share insight based on our experiences with available readers. Our team has had considerable success with both TruTest and AllFlex readers. TruTest readers are noted for their advanced features, particularly useful when scanning cattle chute side. In contrast, AllFlex readers are appreciated for their simplicity and efficiency in getting tag lists from the wand for use in submission forms or health papers.

To apply for reimbursement, please contact Sara Starkey at starkey@mt.gov or 406-444-1587 for a reimbursement form. Please note that funding for this program is limited and will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. DOL's aim is to significantly enhance the efficiency and accuracy of collecting crucial animal health data through electronic means. This effort is part of our broader commitment to support effective animal disease control programs. [a](#)

BRUCELLOSIS UPDATES & TESTING: ANNUAL HERD TESTS AND CUSTOM EXEMPT SLAUGHTER TESTING

Brad De Groot, DVM, PhD

Fall testing for brucellosis is well underway, with around 60,000 brucellosis tests conducted since the start of the fiscal year on July 1, 2023. One serological reactor animal from within the Designated Surveillance Area (DSA) in Park County was euthanized and tissues collected for attempted culture. The animal was culture negative, and the herd has been released from quarantine with a requirement for another whole herd test in the fall of 2024.

The conversation regarding management of this herd and the associated epidemiological investigation, should culture results have been positive, was complicated by the lack of a recent negative brucellosis test on either the serological reactor animal or the herd. Epidemiologic investigations proceed from the point where a herd was last known to be completely brucellosis negative. Practically, this comes down to the last negative whole herd test.

As we have learned over the years, voluntary herd testing at pregnancy detection presents many advantages for ranches operating in the DSA, including:

- Early detection of disease: If spillover infections of livestock can be found in the fall, there is a good chance in getting the herd off quarantine before spring turnout for grazing when conversations about quarantine and grazing on leased or public land become challenging.
- Narrowed scope of an epidemiological investigation: When a reactor is found in a herd, the associated investigation involves testing of source herds for movements into, destination herds for movements out of a herd, and fence line contacts to the herd since the point the herd was last demonstrated negative. The shorter that period is, the easier the movement tracing process is to accomplish.
- Control over timing of when herds are worked: If a reactor is found in a neighboring herd, and the ranch has already shown its herd to be brucellosis negative with a whole herd test between July 16 and February 15, that ranch does not need to run the herd through the chute again to demonstrate freedom from brucellosis.

Department of Livestock (DOL) pays all laboratory costs for DSA brucellosis testing, compensates producers \$2.00/head for handling while testing, and compensates veterinarians on a sliding scale from \$6.00 to \$10.50 per head for specimen collection. DOL is convinced that annual whole herd testing provides excellent value to both ranches operating in the DSA as well as those operating outside the DSA. We encourage all DSA operations to herd test annually.

DOL is continuing to work on brucellosis surveillance at custom exempt slaughter plants as mentioned in the September Stock Quotes newsletter. Young cows that lose pregnancies, fail to keep calves alive through the neonatal period, or otherwise show poor milking or mothering ability are often attractive for ranch use or private sale and slaughter. Similarly, some small operations specialize in providing animals for the freezer beef market and therefore don't provide animals to the other surveillance streams maintained by DOL. Early detection of brucellosis infection is hugely advantageous any time it occurs. A brucellosis program at custom exempt slaughter plants will provide another opportunity for early detection of brucellosis infection. DOL asks you to encourage clients to utilize facilities that provide specimens for brucellosis testing when they select custom exempt slaughter establishments. Please contact Dr. Brad De Groot at 406-475-2693 or Bradley.DeGroot@mt.gov with any questions or comments. a

VETERINARY EXPORT HEALTH CERTIFICATION SYSTEM (VEHCS)

Scott Beutelschies, DVM

Happy Holidays from the Montana United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (USDA APHIS) Veterinary Services team! This time of the year is always busy with pet travel and livestock movements. Please take a moment to review the links below and bookmark them as necessary to facilitate the creation of Veterinary Electronic Health Certificates. Also, the beginning of the new year often triggers accreditation renewals, inspection updates for Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) labs and Facilities for import and export of animals and animal products. Please contact your USDA Veterinarian in Montana to schedule an appointment or call the Montana Veterinary Services Area office for assistance at (406) 437-9450. USDA-APHIS would also like to introduce our new National Veterinary Accreditation Program (NVAP) coordinator Jenna Frazier who can answer your federal accreditation questions as well as facilitate getting the answers you need to complete your accredited work in Montana.

YouTube Video Guide to Issuing Health Certificates: This 22-minute video <https://bit.ly/3RSkGes> outlines the steps to complete a health certificate. The video covers health certificate types required fields and how to complete, common mistakes, and other tips. This is a great refresher for accredited veterinarians and their staff who help prepare certificates! Please view it before the busy holiday travel season!

Pet Travel Website for USDA Accredited Veterinarians: APHIS' Pet Travel Website <https://bit.ly/3GUnzVU> provides important information on certifying pets for international travel, completing and submitting health certificates for USDA endorsement, and accessing and using the Veterinary Export Health Certification System (VEHCS). The Accredited Veterinarian page here <https://bit.ly/3ttWo14> is a great resource for a myriad of pet travel topics, including:

- Knowing Your Responsibilities as an Accredited Veterinarian
- An Accredited Veterinarian's Role in the International Export of Animals
- Preventing Endorsement Delays
- When the Airline Will Not Accept the Health Certificate
- Frequently Asked Questions About Pet Travel for Accredited Veterinarians



Figure 2. VEHCS. Source: USDA.

Veterinary Export Health Certification System (VEHCS) Help Page: Be sure to bookmark <https://bit.ly/3GQEZmn> for beginning and expert VEHCS users! It includes these unbelievably valuable guides such as Step-By-Step Guide to Using VEHCS, Quick Reference Guides for VEHCS users, FAQ for VEHCS and NVAP Module 34: Veterinary Export Health Certification System (VEHCS). ☞

UPDATING YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION: A FRIENDLY REMINDER

Britta Sekora

The Department of Livestock (DOL) would like to remind Montana Veterinarians of the importance of keeping your contact information up to date. Accurate and current contact details are vital for receiving timely communication and updates from our office. We understand details such as updating contact information can be overlooked amidst busy practice schedules.

Fortunately, there are two convenient options available to update your contact information:

- Online form: This quick and easy form is readily accessible on our website here: <https://bit.ly/3RUqulr>
- Phone: Feel free to contact our office directly at 406-444-2976. Our Animal Health Bureau (AHB) team will be more than happy to assist you in updating your information.

Equally important is keeping your contact information up to date with the Montana Board of Veterinary Medicine and United States Department of Agriculture Veterinary Services (USDA-VS).

- USDA-VS can be reached at Jenna.Frazier@usda.gov or 406-437-9456
- Montana Board of Veterinary Medicine information can be updated here: <https://bit.ly/3NzTezu> or by phone at 406-444-6886 ☞

UNUSUAL MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY EVENTS (UME)

Merry Michalski, DVM

United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (USDA-APHIS) has shared information regarding a new and exciting program: the Unusual Morbidity and Mortality Events program or UME. The goal of this program is to help veterinarians arrive at a diagnosis in unusual cases where routine initial testing fails to provide a diagnosis. The hope is that the program will help discover new pathogens or established pathogens that have evolved (i.e.: gained resistance or virulence, new species infected, etc.). An improved understanding of disease-causing pathogens may lead to better patient or herd care, including more appropriate treatment choices and preventative measures.

All species are eligible for UME consideration, and any veterinarian can request a UME provided the disease event associated with the request meets one or more of the following criteria:

- An unusual or atypical manifestation of disease, including high morbidity, mortality and/or rate of spread.
- Findings suggest a possible effect on trade, public health, or the viability of an industry or region.
- A genuine suspicion of an exotic or emergency animal disease that is not otherwise being investigated by USDA-APHIS as a Foreign Animal Disease (FAD).

UME will provide funding for testing to establish a diagnosis in instances where routine screening diagnostics fail to determine the pathogen causing the disease. Epidemiologic investigation support is also available as needed. Testing must be conducted at a National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) laboratory and test results must be made available to the UME program.

For case consideration, please contact the UME Team at aphis.ume@usda.gov with an overview of the situation, including descriptive epidemiology and previous diagnostic findings. You must also submit a diagnostic plan, including estimated costs, to the UME Team so they can help guide or bring in expertise. Approval for a UME requires concurrence between the State Animal Health Official (SAHO), which is the Department of Livestock (DOL), and the Area Veterinarian in Charge (AVIC).

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