

HUNTER'S ALERT

Watching Out For Bird Flu

(NAPSA)—Many Americans may be surprised at the coalition created to combat avian influenza, or bird flu, a major concern in many parts of the world. Federal, state and municipal groups are working together with scientists and hunters to discover the disease in wild migratory birds in time to save human lives. So far, no Americans are known to have become ill because of avian flu in the United States.

Field specialists and wildlife disease biologists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), state fish and game agencies, universities and nongovernmental organizations collected nearly 100,000 samples from wild birds in all four major flyways. They also collected about 50,000 samples from waterfowl habitats across the country. Taking samples provides an early-warning system for disease.

Waterfowl hunters can help. Since one surveillance strategy involves sampling hunter-harvested birds at hunter check stations, having hunters' cooperation is very helpful. Hunter-harvested birds provide a unique opportunity to sample large numbers of birds without having to capture them.

Hunters need not worry that their game is being sampled. Hunting wild birds is considered safe as far as avian flu is concerned. As always, it is recommended that hunters take commonsense precautions when handling, cleaning and cooking their game. For instance:

- Do not handle or eat obviously sick game.
- Wear disposable gloves when handling and cleaning game.
- Wash hands and equipment that have been in contact with game.



- Always be sure to thoroughly cook game to at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit to kill disease organisms, parasites and viruses, such as avian influenza.

Another way hunters can help is to report any large numbers of dead waterfowl they might see to wildlife authorities or the USDA by calling (866) 4USDA-WS. The USDA and state fish and game agencies routinely investigate when groups of wild birds become sick or die. There are many instances every year when groups of birds become sick or die for a variety of different causes, so timely reporting helps government surveillance efforts.

Meanwhile, you can protect yourself and your family if you remember to practice good health habits, including eating a balanced diet, exercising daily and getting sufficient rest. Three other commonsense steps to stop the spread of germs include.

1. Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
2. Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues.
3. Stay away from others as much as possible if you are sick.

For more information on avian influenza and the USDA's efforts, visit <http://www.usda.gov/birdflu> or <http://www.avianflu.gov>.