

# Bioveterinary Research starts bird flu vaccine trials

The Ministry of Agriculture has asked Wageningen Bioveterinary Research (WBVR) to investigate the efficacy of three vaccines for bird flu.

The trial, which will take about three months, is of vaccines to protect against the H5 virus in laying hens. The first results are expected in December. The vaccine trial will take place in the research facilities of the High Containment Unit in Lelystad. According to the press release, it should give an idea of the effectiveness in preventing disease symptoms

**‘For the first time, the bird flu season continued after the migratory birds left in April’**

and the spread of the virus. The trial involves new types of vaccines from three

pharmaceutical companies.

Calls for an effective vaccine are growing louder as infections continue to be reported. ‘In the past, we wouldn’t see bird flu infections in the summer,’ explains WBVR bird flu expert Nancy Beerens. ‘But this year for the first time, the bird flu season did not come to an end when the migratory birds left in April. The virus survived by infecting birds that live in the Netherlands in the summer. That meant commercial poultry farmers were having to deal with bird flu in the summer too’. The persistent infections have far-reaching consequences for the poultry sector: birds have to be culled at farms with infections, transport bans are in place, and the requirement to keep birds



The requirement to keep birds indoors has applied in some places since October 2021 because of the persistent bird flu infections. Photo Unsplash/ Henrique Ruzon

indoors at all times has not been lifted in many areas since the first cases of bird flu in October 2021.

## Not straightforward

But getting the right vaccine is not straightforward. A vaccine should not only protect against the disease but also stop the virus from spreading. If birds are infectious but don’t show symptoms of illness, there is a risk of the virus spreading unnoticed. That is one reason why the EU has guidelines that restrict trade in vaccinated poultry. WBVR says that the new types of vaccines being tested in this study are expected to give better protection against the spread of the virus. According to WBVR, it is also possible to distinguish between vaccinated and

infected birds using specific diagnostics.

WBVR’s vaccine trial is the first step in research on the possible use of vaccination to combat the bird flu virus in the poultry sector. The outcomes of this study, which will finish in December 2022, will form the basis for follow-up studies in which vaccines will be tested in the field.

Vaccine studies are being conducted in various European countries at the moment. Beerens says the results from these studies will be important in getting support from all EU member states for vaccination. ME