

Statement by
the International Veterinary Pigeons Association (IVPA)

27.10.2020

Racing pigeons are dead-end hosts of avian influenza viruses (AIV)
and play a negligible epidemiological role in the spread

There is extensive and conclusive scientific evidence about this subject:

- At natural inoculation doses, pigeons are barely susceptible to AIV. Even after inoculation with high viral dose, they seldom become sick and show only seroconversion only with a very few strains.
- Finally even if viral particle shedding is detected, transmission to sentinel chickens has not been reported in any of the experimental studies.
- These findings are consistent in all valid scientific studies conducted in recent years.

Previous risk assessment studies in the UK, France and Germany concluded for the low epidemiological risk of the pigeons concerning AIV.

Prof. Abolnik confirmed her assessment of 2014 in a lecture in Warsaw in 2020 during the 1st World Congress of the IVPA, following a detailed current literature study.

In more than 150 years of active organized pigeon racing and pigeon breeding, there has never been a documented AIV transmission within pigeon populations in Europe, nor have pigeons spread AIV to commercial poultry.

As a consequence of all these available data, Germany and France already issued a new legislation, following advice of their veterinary board.

The US also highlights the special epidemiological status of pigeons in relation to Avian Influenza. This is made clear in the Import Alert for Australia. All this is documented in the annexes below.

So there can be concluded that:

Pigeons are a dead-end host for AIV
and thus irrelevant in the epidemiology of the disease.

Attachment:

1) BDRG AIV 2019

- Even with the big epidemic in 2016/2017 all sampled pigeons were AIV negative in Germany

2) AVIS 2017 France (French)

- AVIS de l'Agence nationale de sécurité sanitaire de l'alimentation, de l'environnement et du travail; relatif à une demande d'actualisation des avis sur le risque influenza aviaire hautement pathogène lié aux compétitions de pigeons voyageurs.

3) UK 2017 H5N8 (English)

- Risk assessment on the likelihood of spread of H5N8 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza associated with racing pigeons, Qualitative Risk Assessment March 2017

4) Pigeon AI article Abolnik 2020 (English)

- Abolnik 2020, Lecture given at the 1st World Congress of the IVPA, 6-7 March 2020, Warsaw, Poland; Influenza A virus infection of pigeons