Surveillance for Avian Influenza Viruses in Wild Birds in Denmark and Greenland, 2007–10

In Denmark and Greenland, extensive surveillance of avian influenza (AI) viruses in wild bird populations has been conducted from 2007 through 2010. In Denmark, the surveillance consisted of passive surveillance of wild birds found dead or sick across Denmark and active surveillance of apparently healthy live birds in waterfowl reservoirs and along migratory flyways, birds living in proximity to domestic poultry, and hunted game birds. Dead birds were sampled by oropharyngeal swabbing. Healthy live wild birds were captured with nets, traps, or by hand and were sampled by swabbing of the oropharyngeal and cloacal tracts, or swabs were collected from fresh fecal droppings. Hunted game birds were delivered to game-handling establishments, where each bird was sampled by oropharyngeal and cloacal swabbing. During the 2007–10 period, a total of 11,055 wild birds were sampled in Denmark, of which 396 were birds that were found dead. In Greenland, samples were collected mainly from fecal droppings in breeding areas. Samples from 3555 live and apparently healthy wild birds were tested. All swab samples were tested by pan-influenza reverse transcriptase–PCR (RT-PCR), and the positive samples were further tested by H5/H7 specific RT-PCRs. H5/H7-positive samples were subjected to hemagglutination cleavage site sequencing for pathotyping. In addition, all RT-PCR–positive samples were subjected to virus isolation, and the virus isolates were subsequently subtyped. In Denmark, low pathogenic (LP) H5 viruses were detected throughout the period, in addition to a few LPAI H7 and several other subtypes. In Greenland, very few samples were positive for AI. None of them were found to be of the H5 or H7 subtypes by RT-PCR. Isolation of these viruses in eggs was unsuccessful; thus, they were not subtyped further. The findings did, however, demonstrate the presence of LPAI viruses in Greenland. For several water bird species overwintering in North America and northwest Europe, respectively, Greenland constitutes a common breeding area. This raises the possibility that viruses could be transmitted to North America via Greenland and vice versa. In Denmark, the screenings for AI showed LPAI viruses to be naturally occurring in the wild bird population, particularly in waterfowl. The occurrence of AI viruses in the wild bird population may pose a risk for AI infections in Danish poultry.
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