

Iceland National Report

Akureyri 01.06.2025

Avian Influenza in Iceland

Between late 2024 and early 2025, Iceland experienced a notable outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). The virus primarily affected wild bird populations, and one turkey farm, with limited but concerning spillover into mammals. In December 2024, a ten-week-old kitten in Iceland became seriously ill and died. Post-mortem analysis confirmed infection with the H5N5 strain of HPAI—marking the first confirmed case of this strain worldwide in a household pet in Iceland. The case was reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). In response, Icelandic authorities implemented biosecurity measures, increased wildlife monitoring, and issued public advisories to avoid contact with dead or sick birds.

Veterinary Education

The Agricultural University of Iceland is working to launch a foundational veterinary education program in cooperation with a Polish veterinary faculty (the Warsaw University of Life Sciences). The collaboration aims to address the shortage of veterinary professionals in Iceland and increase the number of veterinary students by offering the initial years of training in Iceland, before they complete their education abroad. The Polish faculty runs a program taught in English, where there is a possibility of admitting Icelandic students that have finished two years of preclinical subjects in Iceland. This means that the Agricultural University will need to put together a curriculum and course plan for the two first years of studies that fulfil the requirements of the European accreditation program. The University have appointed as a project manager a highly capable veterinarian with varied experience within the veterinary sector.

Animal Welfare Administration

The Icelandic Veterinary Association (DÍ) has expressed deep concern over proposed administrative changes to animal welfare governance, introduced by the new parliament that took office in late 2024. One of the proposals involves transferring responsibility for animal welfare from the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries to the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Climate. Although not yet implemented, this idea appears to be gaining traction, partly due to lobbying by animal welfare organizations. DÍ is concerned that political decision-makers may be prioritizing input from advocacy groups over the expertise of veterinary professionals. The association considers the proposed shift poorly justified and indicative of limited understanding of the field. DÍ strongly opposes separating animal health and welfare into different ministries, as these areas are inherently interconnected. A formal request for clarification has been submitted, particularly regarding the future role of the Chief Veterinary Officer, who by law holds professional responsibility for both domains. DÍ warns that such changes could lead to a fragmented system, increased costs, and a decline in animal welfare standards, and urges the government to maintain the current structure under the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries.

Veterinary Medicines and Shortages

DÍ gave their opinion on the government's proposed changes to the Medicines Act (Case No. 257), concerning access to veterinary and human medicines and responses to shortages. The association supports the proposed changes aimed at improving supply security and ensuring timely access to essential veterinary drugs. DÍ emphasized that shortages are a persistent issue

across all categories, including vaccines and antibiotics. They welcomed the use of exemptions from requirements for labelling in Icelandic to facilitate access to substitute medicines and supported new obligations for wholesalers to report both anticipated and unexpected shortages. However, DÍ stressed the need for a more efficient information system to track shortages and available alternatives, and encouraged authorities to develop this system in collaboration with DÍ, the Icelandic Medicines Agency, and the Food and Veterinary Authority. DÍ also highlighted the importance of regulatory flexibility allowing wholesalers to sell remaining stock of substitute medicines even after the registered product returns to market. Without this, wholesalers are unlikely to supply alternatives due to the financial risk of unsellable inventory. Additionally, DÍ emphasized the urgent need to modernize the national veterinary medicine usage database (Búfjárheilsa), which is currently outdated and burdensome. Improved integration between veterinary practice systems and public databases is essential for effective monitoring and reporting.

Mentorship Program

The Icelandic Veterinary Association (DÍ) has initiated a mentorship program to support newly graduated veterinarians and veterinary students in Iceland. The program connects experienced veterinarians with young professionals who may benefit from guidance during their early career stages. The mentor role is still evolving, with flexibility in time commitment and areas of expertise. Students and recent graduates (within two years of graduation) can request a mentor and describe the kind of support they seek. The initiative is voluntary and modelled after similar programs in other Nordic countries. Although initial engagement has been modest, there has been some interest and enquiries. DÍ plans to continue developing the program and will regularly remind students of this opportunity. The goal is to strengthen professional support and improve retention in the veterinary field by fostering peer mentorship—where experienced colleagues offer guidance to newer veterinarians based on shared professional experiences.