

# **NEWS RELEASE**

## **Texas Animal Health Commission**

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### **Rules Set for Pet Bird Movement in Texas' El Paso County**

Pet birds in Texas' El Paso County now may be on their way to new homes, or to a veterinarian's office for medical care, thanks to a relaxation of bird movement restrictions imposed by state and federal animal health officials in early April. All bird movement in El Paso County has been prohibited during the past month, while regulatory veterinarians and animal health inspectors from the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), New Mexico Livestock Board, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) work to eradicate an outbreak of Exotic Newcastle Disease (END), a foreign poultry disease that can wipe out infected bird populations.

"In addition to El Paso County, where we detected a backyard flock infected with END, we have also had state and federal quarantines on Texas' Hudspeth County, and Otero, Luna, and Dona Anna Counties in New Mexico. In these four counties, where we have not had confirmed infected flocks, pet birds have been allowed to move within and between the quarantined counties. In El Paso County, on the other hand, we needed to shut down all movement of birds, until we could assess the possibility of additional infection," said Dr. Max Coats, deputy director for animal health programs at the TAHC, Texas' livestock and poultry health regulatory agency.

"Our joint state and federal teams have tested pet birds or flocks of backyard birds at nearly 500 locations in the five counties and, as of May 8, have found no additional END infection. We've determined that it is scientifically safe for pet birds, such as parakeets, cockatiels, parrots or budgies, in El Paso County to be moved, as long as certain biosecurity and health conditions are met. Each request for movement of pet birds within El Paso County will be considered on a case-by-case basis," Dr. Coats said. He emphasized that chickens, ducks, turkeys and game fowl in the five counties will remain under a movement ban until the quarantines are released.

"We do not want to hinder commerce unduly, but we must take the precautions to prevent any spread of END, which is deadly to all species of birds. Prior to moving a bird from a retail or wholesale pet bird business in El Paso County, the purchaser must sign a register, indicating they understand and will adhere to all movement restrictions," he explained. "When a pet bird in El Paso County needs medical care, first contact your veterinarian, who will obtain movement permission from the END task force in El Paso."

Dr. Coats said that pet birds may not be moved from stores where any of the birds have exhibited clinical signs of illness, such as diarrhea, ruffled feathers or nasal discharge within the previous 15 days. Furthermore, all pet birds being moved must be properly caged or housed during movement. Pet birds from El Paso County may not leave the county until all quarantines are released.

"This relaxation of movement restrictions will allow owners within El Paso County to secure a new pet bird, or to obtain needed veterinary medical attention for their pet birds. Until the quarantines are released, some movement restrictions must remain in place, so that we can trace birds, if additional END infection is detected. We do not know when the federal or state quarantines will be released," he said. "First we must finish testing a sufficient percentage of the

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## **add one/Special Provisions Made for Pet Bird Movement**

birds within the entire five-county area to demonstrate to ourselves, other states and our international trading partners that there is no more infection in the area.”

END affects only bird species, including chickens, turkeys, pet birds and ratites, such as ostriches. Two days to two weeks after being exposed to the virus, infected birds may gasp, cough, exhibit muscle tremors or complete paralysis, develop watery diarrhea, or die suddenly, without signs of illness. In southern California, nine counties are under quarantine, due to an END outbreak that has spread to 22 commercial flocks and to nearly 900 backyard flocks. Nearly 3.5 million birds have been depopulated in an effort to stop the spread of the disease.

“We feel extremely fortunate that this foreign poultry disease outbreak in Texas appears to have been limited to one infected flock in El Paso County. The other four counties were included in the quarantines, because of their proximity to El Paso County. The USDA requires a buffer zone around infected counties, to help prevent disease spread,” said Dr. Coats. “The END virus is very contagious, and aggressive action was taken to prevent the spread of disease.”

Dr. Coats explained that bird owners in the five-county quarantine zone to call the END task force at 915-859-9446 to make reports of sick birds or to discuss movement requests for pet birds within El Paso County. For general END disease information, or to report sick birds in other parts of Texas, call the TAHC at 1-800-550-8242. In New Mexico, producers may call the New Mexico Livestock Board at 505-841-6161.