

Beat: Miscellaneous

Highly contagious bird flu found at Dutch poultry farm

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USPA News - A highly contagious strain of bird flu was identified at a poultry farm in the Netherlands on Sunday, prompting nationwide measures to prevent an outbreak of the virus, less than two weeks after the same strain was found at a farm in northeastern Germany. The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs said the highly pathogenic H5N8 bird flu strain was identified at a poultry farm in Hekendorp, a village in the central province of Utrecht, about 40 kilometers (24.8 miles) south of Amsterdam.

The poultry farm has six stables with a total of about 150,000 chickens. It has no outdoors area for them. Sharon Dijksma, the State Secretary for Economic Affairs, said samples were taken on Friday after chickens at the farm in Hekendorp showed symptoms consistent with bird flu. "Yesterday it became clear that it involved the H5 variant of bird flu and this morning, after laboratory testing, it became clear that the bird flu virus at this company is of a highly pathogenic variant," she said. H5N8 is a highly contagious bird flu strain which is deadly for chickens and could be passed on to humans who are in close contact with infected birds, though there has never been a confirmed human case so far. The municipality of Oudewater, where Hekendorp is located, advised anyone who feels ill after having been to the affected farm to seek medical help. As a result of Sunday's findings, the ministry announced a national ban on the movement of poultry and other birds, eggs, poultry manure, and poultry litter. Other measures include requirements to keep poultry and other birds indoors and away from humans and to restrict access to locations which house birds. A national ban on hunting was also imposed. It is unclear how the farm became infected with bird flu as similar outbreaks are often the result of wild birds whose feces can spread bird flu if they carry the virus, but the poultry farm in Hekendorp has no outdoor areas for its poultry. All 150,000 chickens at the farm will be culled in accordance with European regulations while authorities investigate the company's contacts. Samples are also being taken from 16 other poultry farms in a 10-kilometer (6.2-mile) radius as a precaution. Eric Hubers, the chairman of employers' organization LTO Pluimveehouderij, said the poultry sector was "completely surprised and shocked" by Sunday's news. "The virus is here suddenly and came, as it were, falling out of the sky. No one knows where it came from," Hubers said, calling it a "very worrying" situation. The Ministry of Economic Affairs said that the national measures, which went into effect at 11:30 a.m. on Sunday, were expected to last no more than 72 hours. "The next days will be focused on finding the origin and spread of the virus and to prevent any further spread," Dijksma said. In 2003, the Netherlands was hit hard by an epidemic of the H7N7 bird flu strain, resulting in the cull of more than 25 million birds. It also infected at least 89 people, all except three whom had been in contact with poultry. One of the victims, a veterinarian, died after having close contact with infected poultry.

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