

Netherlands reports Europe's fourth bird flu outbreak

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USPA News - Chickens at a poultry farm southwest of Amsterdam have tested positive for bird flu, making it the second outbreak in the Netherlands and the fourth in Europe, authorities said on Thursday. It is not yet known if the new outbreak involves the highly pathogenic H5N8 strain.

The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs said the cases of bird flu were found at a poultry farm in Ter Aar, a town in the western province of South Holland, about 26 kilometers (16 miles) southwest of Amsterdam. The site is just 18 kilometers (11 miles) northeast of Hekendorp, where H5N8 bird flu was found less than a week ago. Sharon Dijksma, the State Secretary for Economic Affairs, said samples were taken from the farm in Ter Aar on Wednesday after chickens in one of the three stables showed symptoms consistent with bird flu. Laboratory testing confirmed the chickens were suffering from a bird flu virus of subtype H5, but further testing is required to identify the exact strain. "This outbreak involves the H5 variant of bird flu. It is not yet clear if it is a low pathogenic or highly pathogenic variant," Dijksma said. "Further analysis from CVI (the Central Veterinary Institute) will determine that. The expectation is that the results of this analysis will be available no earlier than tomorrow by the end of the day." The state secretary said the poultry farm in Ter Aar has a total of about 43,000 chickens, all of which will be culled in accordance with European Union regulations. Samples are also being taken as a precaution from four other poultry farms in a 10-kilometer (6.2-mile) radius. Due to the new outbreak, the ministry announced a new, 72-hour national ban on all 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. The bird flu outbreaks in Europe began early this month when a turkey tested positive for H5N8 at a farm in northeastern Germany, after which all susceptible birds present at the farm were destroyed. More cases were found at the poultry farm in Hekendorp over the weekend, resulting in the cull of 150,000 chickens. Samples from a duck breeding farm in northern England also tested positive for H5N8. The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) said on Wednesday that the H5N8 virus found in Europe is closely related to the strain found in South Korea. The OIE suspects that the virus was carried by wild birds from Asia - where the virus was found before the recent cases in Europe - to Germany, Netherlands and the UK," said OIE spokeswoman Catherine Bertrand-Ferrandis. Wild birds are known to be able to carry bird flu viruses without getting sick and their migratory flyways sometimes result in outbreaks along their path. But the virus can also spread from farm to farm on the shoes or clothing of workers, by the movement of domestic live birds, and through contaminated vehicles, equipment, food, and cages. The Netherlands was hit hard by an epidemic of the H7N7 bird flu strain in 2003, 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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