

Ban issued on poultry movement in county

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MADISON — To protect the state's poultry industry from further spread of the H5N2 avian influenza virus, a ban has been issued on poultry movements to shows, exhibitions and swap meets in Jefferson, Juneau and Barron counties.

“We are taking the necessary precautions to limit the spread of avian influenza throughout the state of Wisconsin,” said Dr. Paul McGraw, state veterinarian at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

Wisconsin has three confirmed cases of avian influenza in the state since the virus first was found in the Midwest in March, McGraw said.

Authorities stressed there was no risk to public health and no danger to the food supply from the highly pathogenic H5N2 strain, which first was detected in the region in Minnesota early last month.

Turkeys appear to be especially susceptible, though experts long have said all poultry is at risk.

No humans have become ill from the virus and there is no food safety risk.

“Obviously we're under a heightened alert,” said Randy Olson, executive director of the Iowa Poultry Association. “This is the same type of stuff they've been dealing with in Minnesota for a few weeks now. We're trying to learn from them and make sure we continue best practices here.”

Minnesota — the country's top turkey producing state — has killed more than 1.7 million turkeys since the virus first was detected there in early March. The H5N2 virus since has shown up on commercial turkey farms in Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

To fight the virus' spread, the current approach is to quarantine infected farms, destroy all the property's birds, thoroughly disinfect the barns and leave the farm idle for months to ensure the virus is gone.

Multiple outbreaks of avian influenza have occurred most recently in Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Arkansas, the Dakotas and Kansas leading to the depopulation of more than 2.4 million turkeys and chickens.

The discovery of bird flu on an Iowa turkey farm has raised serious concerns that the poultry-killing virus could find its way into chicken barns in the nation's top egg-producing state and rapidly decimate flocks that provide the U.S. with its breakfast staple.

Iowa is home to roughly 50 million hens that lay nearly one in every five eggs consumed in the country.

The highly contagious H5N2 virus has not yet been detected in Iowa chicken barns, but it was confirmed Tuesday on a turkey farm in northwest Iowa — marking the first occurrence in the state of the virus.

“My worst fear at the moment is the virus gets into the commercial egg-laying chicken flocks because that would destroy that particular industry here,” said Kyoungjin Yoon, professor of veterinary diagnostic and production

animal medicine at Iowa State University.

Iowa sales of eggs and egg products exceed \$2 billion a year.

So far, just one commercial egg-laying chicken farm — a 200,000-bird facility in Jefferson County has confirmed the virus.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture said tests confirmed that a flock of about 200,000 chickens at an egg-laying facility in Jefferson County had been infected.

The owner of the egg-laying facility found a dead bird about a week ago and sent it to a laboratory in Missouri for testing. After the initial diagnosis was avian flu, it was sent to another lab in Ames, Iowa, where the diagnosis was confirmed.

It is unclear how the virus gets into the largely enclosed poultry barns, but experts believe the droppings of migratory birds carrying the virus are tracked into barns by workers, equipment or rodents, or in other ways.

Once inside, the virus quickly sweeps through a flock.

DATCP is monitoring the disposal, cleanup and disinfecting of the infected site. Flock owners within the quarantine zone will be notified when restrictions are lifted. At last report, there were no new infections within this area.

The ban announced Friday prohibits any movement to, or participation in, any shows, exhibitions or swap meets held in the counties where H5N2 already has been found.

Additionally, anyone owning a flock that is enrolled in the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP), a flock that qualifies as an affiliate flock under the NPIP, or a flock that is enrolled as a Wisconsin tested flock or associate flock also are prohibited from movement to shows, exhibitions or swap meets in the three counties.

“Gathering poultry together increases the chances of exposure to the virus,” McGraw says. “Returning the same poultry to their home farms increases the likelihood of spreading the disease.”

Commercial poultry producers, backyard flock owners and poultry exhibitors are encouraged to use proper biosecurity methods, including restricting poultry exposure to wild birds, washing hands before and after handling poultry, using dedicated clothing and boots when working with poultry, and cleaning and disinfecting cages and equipment used with poultry.

Meanwhile, in Iowa, several steps have been taken to protect the facilities. Barn ventilation systems and openings are designed to keep wild birds out, and workers must dip boots in disinfectant before entering barns.

Vehicles’ tires and floor mats must be disinfected upon entering and leaving farms, and workers must keep their vehicle windows rolled up, because flies can carry the virus and get into vehicles.

Those steps and numerous others are detailed in a 30-page manual developed for poultry producers by Iowa State Veterinarian David Schmitt. Most were developed to protect against salmonella in eggs in 2011.

“It caused the industry to upgrade biosecurity, and I believe inadvertently their salmonella rule has helped with protection of the egg industry against viral diseases like avian influenza,” said Simon Shane, a poultry industry

consultant and adjunct professor of poultry science and veterinary medicine at North Carolina State University.

“They need to be concerned but nobody needs to get panicked,” Shane said. “I do not believe we will have a wholesale mass uncontrollable outbreak of influenza.”

Bird flu vaccines have been used in other countries, but the U.S. government has no plans yet to widely vaccinate flocks, choosing instead to focus on biosecurity measures to keep the virus out of barns. However, vaccines are under development and in testing.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said infected hens usually stop laying eggs.

The few eggs that are laid generally would not get through washing and grading because their shells are weak and misshapen, making it unlikely contaminated eggs would get to market.

Also, properly cooking poultry meat and eggs would kill the virus, if present, according to the FDA.

Iowa’s egg layers are spread out on 3,800 farms. But just 40 farms have 100,000 chickens or more, meaning the virus showing up at one of them could result in significant loss.

Yoon, the Iowa State professor, said it appears states in the upper Midwest have been more vulnerable because they stay colder and drier longer, conditions favorable for the virus.

New cases should drop to near zero once the weather warms and kills off the virus, but it is likely to return when this fall’s migration begins, according to USDA Chief Veterinary Officer John Clifford.