

Q&A: Details about the latest round of bird flu

January 20 2016, by Rick Callahan And David Pitt



A work station can be seen set up at the entrance to a commercial turkey farm in Dubois, Ind. on Monday, Jan. 18, 2016. National, state and local officials are continuing work on containment and depopulation for the avian flu outbreak that was discovered late last week at 10 farms near the rural Indiana community. Animal health officials investigating a bird flu strain that affected 10 turkey farms in southwestern Indiana have added 156,000 chickens to the list of thousands of birds being euthanized. (Alisha Jucevic/The Herald via AP)

In just a few days, a bird flu virus has led to the deaths of more than

400,000 turkeys and chickens on 10 farms in a southwest Indiana county that's the state's largest turkey producer. Here are some questions and answers about the bird flu virus outbreak in Dubois County, about 70 miles west of Louisville, Kentucky:

WHAT KIND OF FLU IS THIS? IS IT THE SAME FROM LAST SUMMER?

The [avian influenza virus](#) in Indiana is the H7N8 strain. The first of the 10 farms saw a highly pathogenic form, which means infected birds were dying, while most of the other farms saw a low-pathogenic form that only made the birds sick. Officials said low-pathogenic viruses can quickly mutate into the viral form that's deadly to birds.

This isn't the same strain as the H5N2 strain that devastated the poultry industry—mostly in the Upper Midwest—last summer. That strain led to the deaths of 48 million birds, mostly chickens and turkeys.

IS IT DANGEROUS FOR HUMANS?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considers the risk of illness to humans from [bird flu](#) to be very low. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says no human infections from the H7N8 strain found in Indiana have been detected.

WHAT HAPPENS TO INFECTED BIRDS? THE REST OF THE FLOCK?

All of the birds in flocks that officials confirmed had infected birds must be euthanized under USDA protocols dictated by international trade treaties. The birds typically are killed using a type of suffocating foam, though due to cold weather, officials in Indiana also have had to use carbon dioxide gas and a device that delivers a fatal head injury.



Bret Marsh, right, the Indiana State Veterinarian, answers questions from the media Monday, Jan. 18, 2016, on the avian flu situation in Dubois County at the Center for Technology, Innovation and Manufacturing at Vincennes University Jasper Campus in Jasper, Ind. Animal health officials investigating a bird flu strain that affected 10 turkey farms in southwestern Indiana have added 156,000 chickens to the list of thousands of birds being euthanized. (Dave Weatherwax/The Herald via AP)

WHAT DO THEY DO WITH THE CARCASSES?

The carcasses are kept in the barn where they were killed, and composted for 30 days—a process that kills the virus. All affected barns will then undergo a thorough cleaning and disinfection before farmers can restock.

HOW DID IT GET INTO THE BARN AND WHAT STEPS ARE

BEING TAKEN TO PREVENT THE SPREAD?

Federal animal health officials and their Indiana counterparts are still investigating how the virus arrived. Research shows [wild birds](#)' northern migration introduced the H5N2 strain starting last spring, but officials don't know whether the fall and winter migration are to blame in Indiana. Officials also are looking at whether workers traveling between farms, wind or other methods may have spread the H7N8 strain.



In this Jan. 17, 2016, photo, workers wearing contamination suits are driven to turkey houses on a farm along North Hickory Grove Road in Dubois, Ind. Frigid temperatures are hampering efforts to euthanize turkeys at several southwestern Indiana farms where a strain of bird flu was found last week, freezing the hoses used to spread a foam that suffocates the affected flocks, a spokeswoman for a state agency said Monday, Jan 18. (Sarah Ann Jump/The Herald via AP)

WHO PAYS TO EUTHANIZE THE TURKEYS? DO FARMERS HAVE INSURANCE FOR OUTBREAKS?

The USDA pays farmers for the birds that must be euthanized, but not for any that died prior to the government's arrival. But there is no business interruption insurance that covers a farm's lost income from animal disease and little other economic help beyond the government's bird replacement payment.

WHAT OTHER STATES ARE AT RISK?

Federal and state officials are hoping to contain the viral strain to the 10 Indiana farms by using quarantines, euthanizing entire stocks of poultry on those farms and aggressively testing nearby poultry farms and backyard flocks.



In this Jan. 17, 2016, photo, a worker is sprayed as part of the decontamination

process at a farm in Dubois in Dubois, Ind. Frigid temperatures are hampering efforts to euthanize turkeys at several southwestern Indiana farms where a strain of bird flu was found last week, freezing the hoses used to spread a foam that suffocates the affected flocks, a spokeswoman for a state agency said Monday, Jan 18. (Sarah Ann Jump/The Herald via AP)

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING IN WINTER?

Past animal viruses usually spread in spring, and it's unclear why the H7N8 strain has taken hold in January. A USDA spokeswoman says the [viral strain](#) has not yet been found in wild birds, and that suggests it could have developed in wild [birds](#) that overwintered in southern Indiana. It isn't clear whether the mild winter weather played a role, either.

HOW IS THIS AFFECTING THE POULTRY MARKET?

The most immediately noticeable impact has been on export markets. Similar to last year's outbreak, many trade partners began refusing trade imports and places like the European Union, Japan, and South Africa won't take poultry from the entire state of Indiana. Others, including Hong Kong, exclude only products from Dubois County.

WHAT'S THE LONG-TERM OUTLOOK?

Officials hope the current outbreak has been contained and that there's no wider impact. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the rapid response developed after last year's outbreaks seems to have worked, but noted a team is in place to rapidly euthanize flocks and contain any spread.

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