



Vet Med Update

Recent Bird Flu Epidemic Calls for Increased Biosecurity, Expert Says

Recent outbreaks of highly contagious avian influenza, more commonly known as bird flu, have killed thousands of turkeys and chickens in poultry farms throughout the Midwest. This outbreak is causing egg shortages and could lead to increased turkey and chicken prices, especially around the holidays. Dan Shaw, a professor in the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine and a specialist in poultry disease, says these outbreaks point



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to the need for more awareness and enhanced practice of biosecurity at poultry farms around the country.

“This strain of avian influenza, or H5N2, is very difficult to catch before it begins killing birds in large numbers,” Shaw said. “During previous past outbreaks, signs of infection, including depressed appetites, lethargy and ulceration of bare skin on infected birds, have allowed producers time to quarantine individual production houses. This strain gives little warning before birds begin dying, making it very difficult to stop the disease from spreading throughout whole farms. Within just a couple of days, poultry farms can go from healthy to completely devastated.”

Shaw says that experts believe this current outbreak of avian influenza is spread by waterfowl migrating from southern wintering grounds to nesting areas in Canada as the seasonal weather changes. Waterfowl, such as ducks, may be infected but do not develop severe disease. While infected, they can shed the virus in their droppings. The infected fowl stop at ponds and lakes which may be near poultry operations. It also has been theorized that infected droppings may contaminate chaff from grain fields where the birds have been feeding. This contaminated chaff can blow into nearby poultry farms and carry the virus. Shaw has suggestions for poultry farmers to help protect their flocks and prevent the spread of the disease.

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