

Germany detects illegal dioxin levels in poultry

January 9 2011, By JUERGEN BAETZ , Associated Press



In this picture taken Jan. 6, 2011 turkey hens look for feed in Neerstedt near Oldenburg, northern Germany after it was closed. German authorities have stopped more than 4,700 farms from selling their meat and eggs as a precautionary measure against a growing scandal over animal feed contaminated with cancer-causing chemicals that is also affecting exports. Authorities believe some 150,000 tons of feed for poultry and swine containing industrial fat have been fed to livestock across Germany. The fat contains dioxins and should not have been in the food. (AP Photo / Keystone / David Hecker)

(AP) -- German investigators have found excessive levels of cancer-causing dioxin in chicken - the first such confirmation of tainted meat since the discovery that German farm animals had eaten contaminated feed, possibly for months.

Three [chickens](#) - out of 15 samples of chicken, turkey and pork sent to

the EU Commission - showed a [dioxin](#) concentration twice as high as legally allowed, an Agriculture Ministry spokesman said Saturday.

The spokesman said the chicken meat had not been sold but eating it would not have been harmful in the short term since the contamination levels were so low. He declined to be named in line with government policy.

Excessive dioxin levels were previously discovered in German [eggs](#).

Germany had frozen sales of [poultry](#), pork and eggs from more than 4,700 farms to stem the spread of food that could have been contaminated with dioxin. On Saturday, Lower-Saxony state's ministry lifted the ban for 500 dairy farms after tests on milk, butter and cheese showed no dioxin contamination.

Investigators are probing the German firm Harles & Jentzsch GmbH, which had produced fat used in the tainted feed pellets. Samples of the fat contained up to 73 times the approved amount of dioxin, according to tests published Saturday by the Schleswig-Holstein state agriculture ministry. Earlier tests on Friday had found a concentration 77 times above the legal limit.

The state ministry said it had proof the firm had been producing tainted fat for months.

Dioxins are contaminants that often result from industrial combustion, and exposure to them at high levels is linked to an increased incidence of cancer.

The scandal broke after regular random testing revealed excessive dioxin levels in eggs in western Germany.

South Korea and Slovakia on Friday banned the sale of some German imports, while Britain, Italy and the Netherlands launched investigations into food safety.

In Britain, supermarkets giants Tesco, Morrison's and Sainsbury's removed cakes, quiches and other egg products from their shelves after confirming that eggs contaminated with dioxins had been used to produce them.

The British Food Standards Agency said the supermarkets had already sold most of the affected food, which had a short shelf life, but added the risks to humans were minimal.

"There is no food safety risk from eating these products," the agency said on its website.

Italian Health Minister Ferruccio Fazio said his ministry had asked all farmers who import eggs, milk or meat from Germany to check on dioxin levels, but said no Italian farmers had imported the contaminated feed.

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