Medical Xpress

A(H5N8) risk to humans is very low

November 21 2016

Eight European countries have reported highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N8) viruses in wild birds, zoo birds and poultry holdings. This is the second time this virus has been introduced into Europe via the autumn migration of wild birds although A(H5N8) has been circulating continuously in Asia since 2010. Full genome sequencing of recent HPAI A(H5N8) viruses suggest that these viruses remain essentially bird viruses without any specific increased risk for humans. No human infections with this virus have ever been reported world-wide. ECDC's updated rapid risk assessment concludes that the risk of transmission to the general public in Europe is considered to be very low.

HPAI A(H5N8) viruses cluster in the same haemagglutinin (HA) clade as A(H5N1) viruses from Asia and A(H5N6)—which has caused severe disease in humans in China—so the possibility of transmission from birds to humans cannot be completely ruled out. People in direct contact with or handling diseased birds or poultry and their carcasses may be at risk of infection. Given this potential zoonotic risk, control measures for avian influenza in poultry and birds are being implemented by the affected countries to ensure that persons at risk are sufficiently protected from infection.

An increased mortality in wild birds in Europe has been observed compared to the first reports of A(H5N8) in 2014/2015. On 27 October 2016, the Hungarian authorities reported the detection of HPAI A(H5N8) in a wild swan.

Further notifications of HPAI A(H5N8) viruses detected in wild birds and poultry holdings have been made by seven additional European countries. Austria, Hungary and Germany reported outbreaks in poultry and detections in wild birds. Croatia, Denmark, Poland and Switzerland reported infection in wild birds only, while the Netherlands detected HPAI A(H5N8) in wild birds and birds in a zoo. India and Israel are currently reporting outbreaks in birds while South Korea, Taiwan and Russia reported outbreaks earlier this year. Culling of the affected poultry in European countries is ongoing or completed; protection zones and surveillance zones have been established.

Ongoing monitoring and testing of wild birds and domestic poultry in the EU plays an important role in the detection and protection against exposure and subsequent spread of the virus in poultry across Europe. This may equally minimise the human risk via exposure to infected birds.

More information: ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications … enza-H5N8-europe.pdf

Provided by European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)