

U.S. officials to expand bird flu testing

Federal officials, worried migrating birds might bring bird flu to North America, reportedly plan to significantly increase testing of wild birds.

Beginning next month, nearly eight times as many wild birds will be tested as have previously been studied, USA Today reported Wednesday. As many as 100,000 birds will be tested -- up from the 12,000 birds examined since 1996, the United State Department of Agriculture said.

Officials said the expanded program reflects growing concern the deadly H5N1 avian flu virus that has spread across Asia and much of Europe will be carried into the western continental United States by fall.

The virus was discovered in China in 1996 and moved into people for the first time in Hong Kong a year later. It now has been reported in 39 nations, infecting at least 175 people since December 2003, USA Today said.

Scientists say the virus doesn't have the ability to spread easily from person to person. If that happens, it could start a pandemic.

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