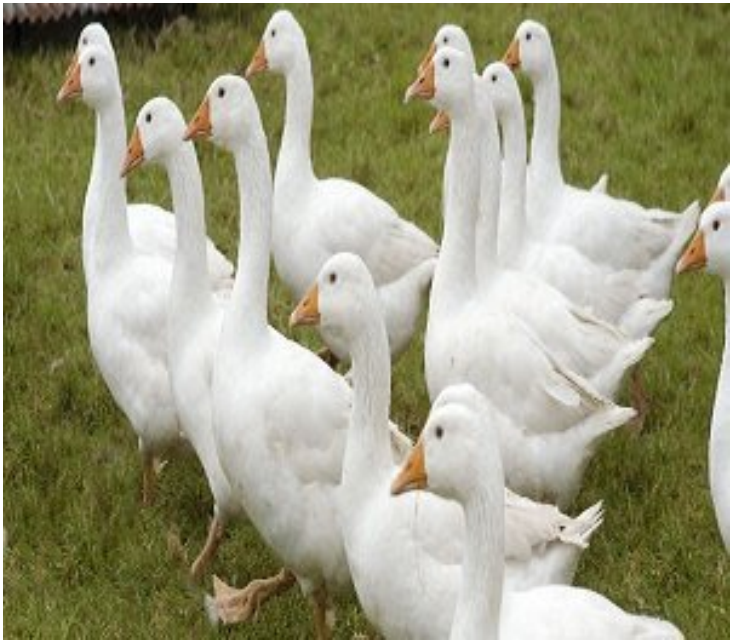


Three new avian flu viral strains detected in Taiwan

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Singapore: Amid sporadic avian flu cases still surfacing in Asia, a new strain H5N3 has been now identified by the Taiwan Bureau of Animal and Plant Health Inspection and Quarantine. The virus has been found for the first time in Taiwan on two goose farms in the southern cities of Kaohsiung and Pingtung.

The discovery has raised bird flu scare in Asia, with poultry authorities stepping up surveillance measures to prevent outbreaks. Around 137 poultry farms were inspected and samples have been collected for testing. The latest results showed that 101 of the farms were infected with the H5N3 virus found at two of them, the bureau said.

Since the last outbreak, three new strains have been discovered including variants of H5N2 and H5N8. All these strains are highly pathogenic, the bureau cautioned.

H5N3 was found in samples from two goose farms in Kaohsiung and Pingtung, and it has been found to be responsible for the deaths of all 53 geese at the latter.

Mr Tsai Hsiang-jung, director-general, Animal Health Research Institute, told a news agency, "The new subtype is a result of virus mutation and recombination. Like the new variant of H5N2 and the H5N8 now spreading across Taiwan, H5N3 is "highly pathogenic and deadly" for the birds."