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Russia Warns of H5N8 Bird Flu Transmission

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Scientists detected the first case of H5N8 transmission to humans at a southern Russia poultry farm last month. **Valery Matytsin / TASS**

The mutating H5N8 strain of avian flu has a high risk of human-to-human transmission, Russian authorities warned Friday.

Anna Popova, who heads Russia's health watchdog Rospotrebnadzor, made the prediction nearly a month after scientists detected the first case of H5N8 transmission to humans at a southern Russia poultry farm.

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"There's a fairly high degree of probability" of human-to-human transmission forecasts, Popova told the state-run TASS news agency.

Though people can get infected with other bird and swine flu subtypes, the H5N8 strain that is

lethal for birds has never been reported to have spread to humans.

“This is likely to happen. Colleagues say that the mutation is continuing very actively,” Popova said.

Popova noted that Rospotrebnadzor and the Siberia-based Vektor state research laboratory “have the time” to develop a test kit and a vaccine, “then monitor the situation.”

“If we won’t need it, it’ll be a lucky break. But if necessary, we’ll be ready,” Russia’s chief sanitary doctor told TASS.

“In other words, we’ll be able to warn the entire world community of the threat.”

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