

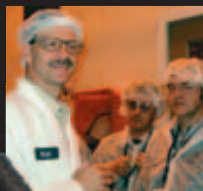
Michigan

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Testing for avian influenza

By JENNIFER VINCENT

MICHIGAN'S way ahead of the curve when it comes to preparedness in dealing with a potential outbreak of avian influenza, specifically the high-pathogenic virus subtype H5N1, says Mick Fulton, an associate professor and avian specialist at Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

The state's Diagnostic Center for Population and Animal Health in East Lansing is the most advanced and equipped state lab in the country, according to Willie Reed, the center's director.

Combined with a comprehensive surveillance program that includes Michigan's departments of agriculture, community health and natural resources, early detection and a vast communication network

Key Points

- State's diagnostic center tests for avian flu.
- The facility conducts more than 1.4 million tests annually.
- It is the only state facility with a biosecurity Level 3 ranking.

will help contain an outbreak, should that occur, officials say.

Reed says the state-of-the-art facility is a critical first line of defense in alerting public-health officials to the presence of diseases transmissible from animals to humans, and helps safeguard the state's animals, wildlife and residents from deadly diseases.

State invests

"We have more necropsy space than any other place in the United States," Reed says.

The center (originally named the Animal Health Diagnostic



LISA NIEMIEC (left), professional aide, and Abby Dye, National Institute of Health student and first-year vet student, conduct indirect fluorescent antibody tests at Michigan's Diagnostic Center for Population and Animal Health in East Lansing.

Laboratory) was founded in the mid-1970s in response to an incident where a fire-retardant chemical, PBB, was accidentally introduced into the state's food chain.

With a \$58 million special appropriation from the state, prompted partly by Michigan's ongoing battle with bovine tuberculosis, the facility is now more than 152,000 square feet and conducts more than 1.4 million tests annually on about 160,000 diagnostic specimens. It is one of the largest veterinarian centers in the world.

The center, owned and operated by MSU, was officially dedicated in September 2004 and has about 120 employees.

Unique to nation

"We are the only state facility in the U.S. with a biosecurity Level 3 distinction," Reed says. That means the center has special engineering and design features, limited or restricted access, and employees with specific training in handling potentially lethal agents. All procedures are conducted in biological safety cabinets, in

other containment equipment, or by personnel wearing appropriate protective clothing and equipment. "We are a HEPA-filtered facility, and what comes into the center, stays here," Reed adds.

The center is participating in an avian Influenza surveillance program with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and USDA.

■ For more on what Michigan is doing to detect and prevent avian flu, see Pages 6-7.

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