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Europe bans imports of US eggs and chicks

RHIANNON EDWARD

THE European Commission yesterday announced a total ban on imports of live birds and eggs from the United States.

The decision is a swift response to confirmation on Monday of an outbreak of bird flu in Texas.

The EU health commissioner, David Byrne, said he was taking drastic action even though the virus in question probably posed a lower public health risk than that which triggered an EU poultry imports ban from Thailand last month.

The transatlantic trade ban hits £14 million worth of egg imports and £17.5 million worth of imports of day-old chicks. The European Union is far from self-sufficient in chickens or eggs.

The EU buys 25 per cent of its egg imports from America and 50 per cent of its requirement for day-old chicks.

The commission did not respond two weeks ago when the US authorities reported an outbreak of avian influenza in Delaware because the virus type was very different from the original Asian outbreak and posed little risk.

The outbreak in Texas is considered much more serious. "Even though the virus in question probably poses a public health risk inferior to the Asian H5N1 virus, I am taking immediate action and suspending the import of live birds, poultry meat and eggs from all of the USA," Mr Byrne announced.

"Except for poultry meat, which is not imported for public health reasons, the community is a major importer of these commodities from the US and we want to ensure that the risk posed by this import is acceptable."

Yesterday's ban applies until 23 March. The situation will be reviewed at a routine meeting of food and animal health experts on 2 March.

The commission's first response to the spread of bird flu came in January when Brussels banned all imports of poultry from Thailand, the only Asian country from which the EU buys chickens.

Web links

- [Dept of Health - pandemic flu](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en)
<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/EmergencyPlanning/PandemicFlu/fs/en>



- [WHO - Bird Flu fact sheet](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/)

Related topic

- [Bird flu](http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=161)

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