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## Bird-flu epidemic fears as children die

CHRIS BRUMMITT IN JAKARTA

AN OUTBREAK of bird flu that has killed at least four people in Indonesia could quickly turn into an epidemic, the health minister warned yesterday, as two more children suspected of having the virus died.

The girls, ages five and two, had symptoms of the disease and authorities were awaiting laboratory test results.

Nine other people have been admitted to Jakarta's infectious diseases hospital with symptoms of the flu.

The government scrambled to calm public fears, announcing plans for mass culls of chickens in infected areas and sacking the country's chief of animal health control for allegedly failing to control the outbreak. But Siti Fadila Supari, the health minister, warned: "If things worsen it could become an epidemic."

The H5N1 strain of bird flu has swept through poultry populations in large swathes of Asia since 2003, killing at least 63 people and resulting in the deaths of tens of millions of birds.

Most human cases have been linked to contact with sick birds.

But the World Health Organisation has warned that the virus could mutate into a form that can easily spread among humans, possibly triggering a global pandemic that could kill millions.

### 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/)  
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