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Bird flu reaches EU for the first time

LIAM PATERSON

THE spread of bird flu has reached an EU country for the first time as it was revealed today that a turkey on the Greek island of Oinousses had tested positive for a form of the virus.

The bird concerned has not been confirmed as having the lethal H5N1 form of the virus. However, tests are continuing and it is known that the H5 strain, of which the deadly form is a member, has been detected.

The Greek health minister, Nikitas Kaklamanis, told Greeks to stay calm. He said the government had stockpiled more than 200,000 doses of flu vaccine that would be made available to people at risk.

In the UK, the Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt said the Government would continue to review its preparations for the anticipated pandemic. In a statement in the Commons yesterday, she said: "as far as any country can be fully prepared against the risk of pandemic flu, we in the UK will be prepared".

Patrick Mercer of the Conservative Party warned that the country might face a situation akin to that of the 1918 flu pandemic if a specific minister was not given special responsibility for combatting the potential threat of the virus. "There has got to be one single person in charge over this, before the sort of signs we saw in 1917 actually turns into the pandemic of 1918. I'm not saying that is going to happen, but there are very dangerous signs."

Meanwhile, EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou announced plans for a simulation of a pandemic to assess how well prepared individual states are, while British scientists travelling to Asia to inspect the spread of bird flu said the number of cases reported in humans might only be "the tip of the iceberg".

Since 2003, around 120 people have been diagnosed with the potentially lethal strain of H5N1, leading to 60 deaths.

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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