

Evening News

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Bird flu toll hits 12 as two more die

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TWO more people have died of bird flu in Asia, bringing the death toll to 12.

An 18-year-old man died in Vietnam, becoming the country's ninth victim, while a 58-year-old man became the third confirmed victim of the disease in Thailand.

So far, the people who have contracted bird flu are thought to have caught it through contact with sick birds.

However, the World Health Organisation has disclosed that it is investigating what could be the first case of the virus spreading between humans.

Two sisters in Vietnam died after possibly contracting the flu from their brother.

Investigators have failed to trace the sisters' infection to a specific event, such as contact with sick poultry, or an environmental source.

Human-to-human transmission cannot be ruled out, but direct contact with sick poultry cannot be ruled out either, WHO says. Health officials may never be able to confirm what happened, in part because the brother's remains have already been cremated.

"The situation is always going to have a question mark hanging over it," WHO spokesman Bob Dietz said in Hanoi.

No other cases of people catching the virus from other people have been suspected.

The latest death, of the 18-year-old, came early today at Vietnam's Hospital for Tropical Diseases in Ho Chi Minh City.

The death in Thailand happened earlier, but health officials did not immediately say when.

Bird flu has killed millions of chickens in ten Asian countries and jumped to humans in Thailand and Vietnam.

China announced five new suspected cases in poultry today, including one in its remote north-western region of Xinjiang - underlining the potentially broad range of the disease.

Xinjiang is more than 1000 miles from the southern region of Guangxi, where China's first case of bird flu was confirmed last week.

Meanwhile, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation appealed for international aid for Asian



farmers, saying they may otherwise resist slaughtering their flocks, a crucial measure in stamping out the disease.

Web links

- [Dept of Health - pandemic flu](#)
<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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