

SCOTLAND on SUNDAY

Sun 16 Oct 2005

Bird flu victims face forced quarantine

RICHARD GRAY AND JEREMY WATSON HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

DRACONIAN measures to forcibly examine and quarantine human victims of the deadly bird flu strain spreading across the world have been introduced by the government as scientists confirmed yesterday the virus had now appeared in mainland Europe.

Laboratory tests carried out in Britain have identified the virus that has killed wild birds in Romania's Danube delta as the H5N1 strain that has devastated flocks in Asia, killing more than 60 people.

All vehicles entering and leaving the infected Romanian region are now to be disinfected and checkpoints have been set up on roads entering the area. Exports of eggs and poultry were banned.

It also emerged a Scots poultry farm was sealed off after some hens fell ill with a suspected bird virus. Castleton Farm, near Stewarton, Ayrshire, was cordoned off as tests for Newcastle disease and Avian flu were carried out but it was reopened yesterday after they came back negative.

Health experts fear if the bird flu virus mutates into an infectious human strain then millions of people around the world could die.

Emergency contingency plans drawn up by the Scottish Executive and the Department of Health in June to deal specifically with the new threat estimate that between 4,500 and 64,000 Scots could die if an outbreak struck in this country.

The report reveals that health boards will be given the power to seek orders from sheriffs to force people they suspect of being infected to have a medical examination and they could be detained in hospital.

Local authorities could also ban individuals from going to work and children would be forbidden from attending school or places of entertainment if they had been exposed to infection.

New criminal offences could also be created in which people knowingly exposing others to the risk of infection could be prosecuted.

The report said the provisions would be possible under powers given to local authorities by the Public Health Acts. It said: "Key provisions include powers to seek orders from a justice of the peace (sheriff in Scotland) requiring a person to be medically examined and to be removed to and detained in hospital."

Infection control experts last night confirmed these powers were likely to be used in the early



stages of an outbreak.

Dr Jim McMenamin, a consultant epidemiologist at Health Protection Scotland, said:

"The contingency plans outline a range of social and medical measures.

"These powers are in place today and available to us tomorrow and it would depend on the level of illness in the population as to which emergency powers would be brought in."

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/)
http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/

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Last updated: 15-Oct-05 23:06 GMT

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