

  
THE SCOTSMAN

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## Countries face quarantine in bid to beat killer disease

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TRAVEL and trade restrictions could be placed on countries if there is a serious outbreak of deadly diseases such as bird flu and SARS under new rules agreed by the World Health Organisation yesterday.

The regulations, adopted by the WHO's 192 member states after two years of negotiations, oblige countries to tighten up disease detection and lay down guidelines for international measures.

In future, the United Nations agency must be informed quickly of any outbreak of four diseases - bird flu, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), smallpox and polio.

The news came as China became the latest country to be caught up in the bird flu scare. It rushed millions of doses of vaccine to a western province near Tibet after migrating geese were found to have died from the virus.

The 178 bar-headed geese found in a nature reserve in Qinghai province were the first cases of bird flu that China has reported since last July. Health experts worry that the birds, which cross the country on routes that stretch from Siberia to New Zealand, could spread the virus to China's vast population of domesticated ducks and geese.

Humans in close contact with infected birds have died from the condition and scientists say it is only a matter of time before bird flu mutates to become a disease passed between humans.

The Chinese government closed all the country's nature reserves to the public and ordered ducks, geese and other poultry in Qinghai to be vaccinated against bird flu. Officials said three million doses of vaccine had been sent to the province.

Farms near bird migration routes elsewhere were also ordered to vaccinate poultry against the disease.

The Beijing government said the virus in Qinghai had not spread to humans or other poultry. However, the death toll in the latest Asian bird flu outbreak rose to 54 yesterday, when another fatality was reported in Vietnam.

China was the source of the 2003 SARS outbreak which spread to 30 countries and killed 800 people, and it has been accused of being slow to inform the WHO and neighbouring countries of what was at the time a new disease.

Under the new rules agreed yesterday, any "potential international public health concern", including outbreaks from unknown causes or sources, and potentially deadly sicknesses such



as cholera and yellow fever, must be reported when they are sufficiently serious.

Dr Lee Jong-wook, the WHO's director-general, said: "This is a major step forward for international health. These new regulations recognise that diseases do not respect national boundaries. They are urgently needed to help limit the threats to public health."

The regulations greatly extend the scope of the previous guidelines, drawn up in 1969, which required countries to report only three diseases - cholera, plague and yellow fever - to the UN agency, but demanded little else.

In any disagreement between the WHO and a member state on the seriousness of an outbreak, the rules allow the head of the UN body to summon a committee of experts to make recommendations on tackling the health threat. Such recommendations could range from continued vigilance to the requesting of proof of vaccination and to travel bans for people or goods.

Member states now have two years to make the regulations part of their own national law.

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

### Related topics

- [Bird flu](http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=161)  
<http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=161>
- [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome \(SARS\)](http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=414)  
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