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## Fears as bird flu found in Romania

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FEARS that the deadly bird flu virus may have reached mainland Europe grew yesterday after three suspected cases were found in Romania.

The Romanian government said three cases of bird flu had been found in ducks in a village in the east of the country, only days after health experts in Washington said the world is unprepared to fight the disease.

Romania's agriculture minister, Gheorghe Flutur, said: "We discovered today three cases of domestic birds which were tested positive for the avian flu, in the village of Ceamurlia de Jos in the Danube delta."

But Mr Flutur said that he did not yet know whether it was the deadly H5N1 strain of the disease. "We will send the samples to Great Britain for a thorough analysis," he added.

Access in and out of the small village of Ceamurlia has now been restricted after the three ducks were found dead in the Danube delta. The transport of animals from the area has also been banned.

Authorities worldwide are on the alert for confirmed cases of fowl infected with the H5N1 strain of bird flu circulating in parts of Asia.

More than 60 people in Asia have died after contracting bird flu, a handful possibly catching it from other humans.

The virus does not easily move from person to person, but scientists worry that H5N1 might mutate into a form that passes easily between people, potentially sparking a pandemic of human flu.

If confirmed as bird flu H5N1, the Romania cases would be the first to be confirmed in mainland Europe.

"We are in the phase of suspicion," said Gabriel Pedoi, a health official. "We are trying to isolate the virus ... and we are taking all measures to isolate the disease."

Bird flu H5N1 was first found in Hong Kong in 1997, with six people dying after contracting the virus. It wasn't until last year that the virus began to spread through Asia, with fears of a global pandemic intensifying.

Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam all reported cases,



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infecting millions of chickens. In total, more than 60 people have died in Asia.

US health figures show that of all humans contracting the virus in Asia, 76 per cent have died, meaning it could develop into the world's worst-ever infection disaster, if it gains the ability to pass from person to person.

The 1918 "Spanish flu" pandemic, which killed about 40 million people worldwide, had only a 1 per cent fatality rate.

"The world is clearly unprepared, or inadequately prepared, for a pandemic of H5N1 influenza," the US health and human services secretary, Mike Leavitt, told a meeting of delegates from 80 nations and international agencies on Thursday.

In August, Finland's agriculture ministry reported that they had found the first cases of bird flu in Europe, although tests later showed that these fears were unfounded.

### 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/)

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