

Evening News

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Fears bird flu fight could take 2 years

BILL ANDREWS

INTERNATIONAL health officials have warned the bird flu striking Asia's poultry could take up to two years to conquer, despite assurances from hard-hit Vietnam and Thailand that outbreaks are being brought under control.

Tens of millions of chickens across Asia have been felled by infections or slaughtered in containment efforts as the virus spread across half the continent, jumping to people in Vietnam and Thailand. The human death toll stood at 19 today.

Ten of the region's governments have dealt with the disease over the past couple of months, from Japan to Thailand to Indonesia, with China boosting its culling efforts in the past couple of weeks as reports of infections in the huge country increased.

Thai officials have said slaughtering more than 28 million chickens has brought the disease under control there, while Vietnam has said its outbreak is easing. But the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation said it would take much longer to bring the region under control.

FAO animal health officer Peter Roeder said: "I would have thought that we'd be looking at a period of six months but it could be as long as two years." Vietnamese officials expressed optimism about their outbreak yesterday even as they announced a new case of human infection - a 22-year-old man hospitalised in the capital Ho Chi Minh city - bringing the country's confirmed cases to 20. Fourteen of those have died.

"We can affirm that the outbreak has begun to stop," said Bui Quang Anh, top veterinary official in the agriculture ministry.

However, World Health Organisation representative Pascale Brudon said it was far too early to say the disease is on the wane.

She said: "We still have a large number of outbreaks.

"We still have human cases every day. We're making progress but it still hasn't been contained."

Bird flu experts will meet in Bangkok this month to discuss how to battle the disease and revive chicken industries.

International virus and epidemic experts will meet next week under the auspices of the WHO and the US Centers for Disease Controls.



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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