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Human infection fear of bird flu

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THE deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu could be passing from person to person in Turkey, a senior World Health Organisation (WHO) expert said yesterday.

Guenael Rodier, the WHO's head of communicable diseases and response, said even though health experts have no evidence that the virus is spreading that way, experts cannot rule out person-to-person infection, because "we haven't documented each and every case properly".

He added: "When you have a mother and a child, and both get sick, you don't know if they both were exposed to the chickens, or if the mother got sick because she was caring for the child.

"It leaves room for some question marks," he added. "We have not documented every transmission story."

But he said even if human-to-human contact is established, it could end up being contained within families and not necessarily trigger the feared pandemic. Preliminary tests have confirmed H5N1 in 18 Turks, including three children who died last week.

Experts have said all the cases appear to have involved people who touched infected birds, and there is no evidence pointing to direct infection between people. "There is absolutely no element that makes me think this is the case," said Mr Rodier.

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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