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Iran kills birds in flu clampdown

Iran ordered the destruction of about 1,000 birds in the north-east of the country and banned imports of fowl in an attempt to keep the country free of avian flu which is raging through neighbouring Turkey.

Health minister Kamaran Bagheri Lankarani told state TV that the import ban was a temporary "preventive" measure.

"Authorities slaughtered about 1,000 birds and banned trade of birds as preventive measures in Western Azerbaijan province because of outbreak of bird flu in Turkey," Lankarani said.

The minister said the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu had not been detected in Iran.

Lankarani said Iran was on high alert since the outbreak began in Turkey, with which it shares a long border. Both countries are on the north-south migratory route of wild birds, which are believed to be spreading the disease.

"We are on alert and have stockpiled enough vaccines to fight against the disease," Lankarani said.

So far, 18 people in Turkey, including three children who died last week, have tested positive for the H5N1 virus. Turkish authorities have said that all the cases appeared to have involved people who touched infected birds.

No human-to-human transmission of the disease has been found. World health officials fear such a mutation in the virus could lead to a global flu pandemic.

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