


THE SCOTSMAN

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More cash 'could end bird flu in poultry'

EMMA ROSS IN GENEVA

THE deadly bird flu virus could be wiped out in poultry worldwide within a year if enough money was spent on the problem, a senior official at the United Nations' agriculture agency said yesterday.

Experience of stamping out bird flu in poultry in Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong shows that it is technically possible, said Samuel Jutzi, the director of animal production and health at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

As a result of mistakes early in the latest outbreak, the H5N1 strain has become endemic in Vietnam, China and Indonesia, and despite millions of pounds being spent on control since 2003, the scale of the problem is increasing in the region.

Scientists fear it is only a matter of time before it mutates into a virus that can pass easily between humans, causing millions of deaths around the world.

"We just haven't spent enough money," Mr Jutzi said.

"It can be contained in domestic birds. It can be eliminated in domestic birds, but at the current level of money, it cannot be contained."

Mr Jutzi said his agency planned to announce its estimate of how much money it would take to eliminate the virus from the world's poultry stocks at the meeting today, but he would not reveal the figure in advance.

However, the FAO has previously estimated that the cost of upgrading control on small farms alone in Vietnam, the country worst-hit by bird flu, would be more than US\$500 million (£287 million).

Experts are trying to stamp out H5N1 outbreaks in poultry to reduce the chances of the virus mutating into a form that passes easily between people.

The more the virus circulates among birds, the more opportunities there are for a mutation. Eliminating the infection from poultry is considered the best strategy for preventing it from evolving.

In its current form, it does not easily infect people. However, 124 human infections have been recorded, mostly in poultry farmers or others who have had close contact with birds. At least 63 people have died as a result.



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/

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