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Turkish boy dies in suspected case of bird flu

MARGARET NEIGHBOUR

ONE of five Turkish children being tested for bird flu has died and another is in a critical condition, the chief physician at the hospital where they are being treated said yesterday.

Five children and a 35-year-old woman suffering from fever and pneumonia-like symptoms have been tested for the bird flu virus over the past two days.

The 14-year-old boy who died had been on life support after his brain function stopped, said Huseyin Avni Sahin, the chief physician at 100 Yil Hospital in the country's south-eastern Van province.

"Two of the children's situation is critical," the doctor, had said just hours earlier. "This doesn't mean it is bird flu. Bird flu is one of the possibilities."

Dr Sahin said it was too early to call their illness bird flu and that the hospital was awaiting test results from Ankara. Turan Buzgan, a health ministry official, said those results could come very soon.

"There are six cases. It's viral pneumonia and four of them could be related to a disease with poultry," Mr Buzgan said, adding that his ministry was carrying out quick tests and sending a health team to the region.

Symptoms of pneumonia are very similar to symptoms of viral infections, another doctor at the hospital added. Four of the children - two brothers and two sisters between six and 15 years old - were admitted to hospital on Saturday after developing high fevers, coughing and bleeding in their throats.

The children helped to raise poultry on a farm and were in close contact with sick birds. They became sick after reportedly eating one of them.

"I hope they are not diagnosed with bird flu. But they are suspected cases of bird flu since they ate a sick chicken and they were in close contact with fowl," Dr Sahin said.

The World Health Organisation says poultry is safe to eat in areas affected by the virus so long as it is properly cooked.

The two other patients, aged 35 and five, were sent to the same hospital yesterday.

Turkish authorities last week said some chickens had tested positive for an H5 variant of bird flu and placed parts of an eastern town, Aralik, near the border with Armenia, under quarantine.

The sick brothers and sisters are from the town of Dogubeyazit, just 37 miles south of Aralik.



"As a precaution, we have forbidden the passage of any poultry into or out of the district. Security forces, along with teams from the agriculture ministry, are checking entrances and exits," a local official said.

Web links

- [Dept of Health - pandemic flu](#)
<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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