


THE SCOTSMAN

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WHO demands cash to fight bird flu

FOREIGN STAFF

THE bird flu rampaging through Asia made the leap into China yesterday, while a second boy in Thailand died of the disease.

The rapid spread of the virus, which has now erupted in ten Asian countries and killed eight people in Vietnam and Thailand, prompted the World Health Organisation to ask for money and expertise to fight an all-out war against it.

"This is a serious global threat to human health," said the WHO chief Lee Jong-Wook. "We must begin this hard, costly work now."

China's Xinhua news agency said the H5N1 strain of the bird flu had killed ducks in the southern province of Guangxi.

About 14,000 poultry within a two-mile radius of the Guangxi farm had been culled, the agency said, adding that poultry three miles from the site had been quarantined.

"Clearly it is of concern now that there is an outbreak here in China. The opportunity to interact with human beings is obviously very apparent," said Dr Julie Hall, a WHO co-ordinator in Beijing. "It is urgent that the matter is dealt with quickly."

Culls and quarantining of poultry should be implemented and human contact with animals limited in order to prevent the opportunity for the virus to transmit to humans, she said.

The fear is that the virus might mate with human influenza and unleash a pandemic among people with no immunity to it.

China's huge population and the number of people living in close proximity to livestock in farms across the country have alarmed epidemiologists, who are worried that they will be cauldrons for the next big flu epidemic. Guangxi province also borders Laos, where a senior agriculture ministry official said the disease had struck in an area around the capital, Vientiane.

Health officials say that the country's poor infrastructure may not be able to cope with containing the flu.

Vets suspected that the death of chickens at a farm in the central Chinese province of Hubei and of ducks at a farm in the southern province of Hunan were also caused by bird flu, Xinhua said.



Japan, which banned Thai chicken imports before the Bangkok government confirmed it was fighting an outbreak, promptly shut its doors to chicken from China's massive poultry farms. Japan imports about a third of all the chicken it consumes from China.

Japan and Singapore have banned imports of birds other than chickens, including ostriches and parrots, shipped from countries reporting bird flu outbreaks.

Other countries are also taking measures to try to keep out the disease.

Australia has tightened surveillance at sea, restricted public access to poultry farms, and deployed sniffer dogs and X-ray machines at airports to stop people from bringing in potentially tainted gourmet food and souvenirs.

Meanwhile, Singapore is shielding its bird farms with netting. It is also doubling farm inspections to twice a day and stepping up checks on fowl shipments from Malaysia.

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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