

New outbreak of bird flu in South Korea

South Korea is struggling with its first outbreak of bird flu for over a year.

This new outbreak is only 70km from the capital, Seoul, and has occurred on a chicken farm. Even though the outbreak of illness among the birds has not yet been confirmed as H5N1, the authorities have gone ahead with a cull of over 20 000 birds. If the presence of the virus is confirmed, further birds will be culled.

Until this last outbreak all cases were confined to the south west of the country, about 320km south of Seoul.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on the 8th of April reported that there have been 379 confirmed cases of humans catching the deadly H5N1 form of bird flu worldwide, of which 239 have died, since surveillance started in 2003.

There have been no human cases of H5N1 reported from South Korea, according to the WHO.

Bird flu is a global concern because many experts believe it is only a matter of time before the virus mutates to a form where it spreads from human to human (currently humans can only get it from close contact with infected birds). Given the high mortality, such an event would trigger a devastating worldwide epidemic killing millions of people.

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