

N.Korea confirms bird flu outbreak

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(CNN) -- North Korean officials for the first time have acknowledged that avian flu has broken out in the repressive country.

"Hundreds of thousands" of chickens were burned before burial to prevent spread of the disease, which can spread to humans, the country's official media outlet Korean Central News Agency said on Sunday.

However, KCNA said North Korea had no reports of human infection.

The report said the State Emergency Veterinary and Anti-Epizootic Committee was working on the problem, reporting outbreaks in "a few" locations, including the Hadang Chicken Farm, one of Pyongyang's largest.

"Upon its outbreak on those farms the committee lost no time to take emergency measures and meticulously organized veterinary and anti-epizootic work to prevent its spread to other poultry farms," the KCNA report said.

South Korea responded to the outbreak by saying it was prepared to help Pyongyang contain the virus and make sure it didn't cross the border, according to Reuters.

Seoul's response would likely include tightening quarantine measures, particularly at two major crossing points between the countries, Reuters said.

The news agency added that South Korean health and agriculture officials would meet to discuss further measures to the outbreak.

Sunday's report comes more than a week after South Korean media said bird flu had broken out in the North Korean capital last month. North Korean officials had previously said their country was free of the disease.

But it remained unclear if the strain of virus involved was H5N1, which has been known to jump from birds to humans.

Since late 2003, WHO has registered a total of 69 human cases of the H5N1 strain of bird flu. Forty-six of those were fatal -- 33 in Vietnam, 12 in Thailand and one in Cambodia.



Bird flu started its sweep across large parts of Asia in late 2003.

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