

Fresh poultry deaths trigger fears of bird flu spread

Hundreds of chickens in West Bengal's Malda district have died in the past few days close on the heels of a fresh outbreak of bird flu in a neighbouring district but the administration said there was no reason to panic.

'There is nothing to be scared of as it has not been confirmed that the poultry birds died of H5N1 strain. A team of veterinary surgeons has already examined the dead birds and have seen no such bird flu related symptoms,' Malda District Magistrate C.R. Das told IANS.

He said as a precautionary measure the district Animal Resource Development (ARD) department, headed by deputy director N.K. Shit, has already sent blood samples of the dead poultry birds to a laboratory in Kolkata.

About 200 chickens have died in a state-run poultry farm at English Bazaar town in Malda since March 13.

The ARD officials have collected eight blood samples and sent them to Kolkata. The officials have also suggested the lab to send these samples to the High Security Animal Disease Laboratory (HSADL) in [Bhopal](#) for further confirmation.

'Till now we are not sure if the chickens died of bird flu. It is yet to be confirmed. But if it's tested positive we would take necessary action and ask the ARD department to start culling operation immediately in the affected area,' Das said.

There were about 3,000 Ireland Red chickens and 13,000 chicks in the state-run poultry farm at English Bazar, the second largest in the state, under the supervision of the ARD department.

'After primary examination it's been detected that the chickens died with symptoms of diarrhoea and drowsiness. The experts are closely monitoring the situation now,' the district magistrate said.

This week, the state government culled about 28,000 birds in Murshidabad district where the deadly H5N1 virus resurfaced nearly a month after the government claimed avian flu had been contained in the state.

Meanwhile, over 200 chickens also died in a poultry farm at Chanditala in Hooghly district Friday.

The H5N1 virus causes a type of influenza in birds that is highly contagious. It does not usually infect people unless they come in close contact with infected birds or contaminated surfaces.

Bird flu was first confirmed in West Bengal Jan 15 this year.

The affected districts were South 24-Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Birbhum, South Dinajpur, Murshidabad, Nadia, Burdwan, Malda, Bankura, Cooch Behar, Purulia and West Midnapore.

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