

Avian flu spreads, West Bengal to cull 2.55 million birds

With the avian flu spreading to new areas in West Bengal, the government announced Thursday that it would end up culling a whopping 2.8 million poultry birds by Saturday.

'We had culled about 2.55 million birds by Wednesday. We hope to complete the rest in two more days,' Animal Resource Development Minister Anisur Rahman said.

The authorities continued to maintain that the deadly virus that has gripped the length and breadth of West Bengal had not infected human beings in the state since it was detected Jan 15.

Health Minister Surya Kanta Mishra said 18 samples had undergone laboratory tests and that about 1.8 million people in the affected regions were under the scanner for possible infection.

'We are quarantining the cullers for a certain time and administering them Tamiflu,' he said.

Minister Rahman said all poultry and egg sellers would be compensated for the loss and each family losing chickens and ducks to culling or to deaths from the virus would get Rs.500.

Reports from the High Security Animal Disease Laboratory (HSADL) in [Bhopal](#) confirmed that samples from Suri I block in Birbhum districts, Raghunathganj II in Murshidabad district and Chanditala II in Hooghly district close to [Kolkata](#) had tested positive for avian influenza.

Hooghly District Magistrate Vinod Kumar confirmed the outbreak in Hutpur village, barely 20 km from Kolkata. Areas affected by bird flu now ring the city of 15 million, creating a real scare.

The HSADL is yet to confirm reports of bird flu spreading to Baduria area in Kolkata's adjoining North 24-Parganas district but the government has said that the deadly H5N1 strain has been found in the samples taken from there.

Officials in [New Delhi](#) said that among the 1.6 million people surveyed, teams of healthcare personnel had detected 3,700 people with signs of upper respiratory infection such as cold, cough and fever.

Only 28 of them have had a history of exposure to poultry. However, none of these people had symptoms of avian influenza like lung infection, breathlessness or lung patches visible on X-ray.

Under widespread attack for not acting fast, the government is desperately trying to contain the bird flu's spread.

Villagers in Bajitpur, Parchandrahat and Chattaparulia in Birbhum's Mayureswar-I block, which is affected by bird flu, reportedly exhumed culled poultry birds Monday and marched to the panchayat office seeking interim relief of Rs.500 for each family.

The culled birds were again buried in the trenches at the intervention of the police, who issued a stern warning that anyone found exhuming dead birds would be arrested.

Bird flu was confirmed in West Bengal Jan 15. The affected districts are South 24 Parganas,

Howrah, Hooghly, Birbhum, South Dinajpur, Murshidabad, Nadia, Burdwan, Bankura, Malda, Cooch Behar, Purulia and West Midnapore.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has described the West Bengal situation as 'serious'.

In neighbouring Bangladesh, which shares a long border with West Bengal, bird flu has affected 29 out of 64 districts. The Bangladesh authorities declared the outbreak Jan 3.

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