

## Bird flu: Assam to cull 80,000 poultry along Bengal border

The union health ministry Friday raised an alarm in the northeastern state of Assam by asking authorities to cull an estimated 80,000 poultry in villages bordering the bird-flu hit state of West Bengal, officials said.

'We have been asked by the central health ministry to undertake precautionary culling of birds in villages falling within five kilometres of Assam's border with West Bengal,' a state veterinary official told IANS.

There are an estimated 100 villages within the five-kilometre radius in Assam's Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts.

'There could be an estimated 80,000 poultry in the area where we have been advised to carry out culling,' the official said.

The Assam government has already alerted rapid response teams in the two districts and the culling of birds is expected to begin Saturday.

'There are lots of formalities to be done and by Friday evening or early Saturday we are expecting some equipment from [New Delhi](#) for the culling process,' the official said.

'There is no need for panic and the culling is being done just as a precautionary measure,' he added.

Bird flu has spread to 13 of West Bengal's 19 districts since the outbreak was confirmed Jan 15.

The World Health Organisation fears that the H5N1 strain could mutate into a form easily transmitted between humans and spark a deadly pandemic.

Last year, an outbreak of avian influenza in the northeastern state of Manipur led to the culling of some 200,000 birds.

Meanwhile, the poultry business has already been hit in Assam after the outbreak of bird flu in adjoining West Bengal.

Assam and other northeastern states have already banned the import of poultry from West Bengal.

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