

[Uganda intensifies fight against bird flu \(WHO Report\)](#)

The Ugandan government has intensified its fight to prevent the bird flu from entering the gate by putting up perimeter on the border.

Uganda has put veterinary staff along the Ugandan border from the northern Arua district to western border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on full alert following the death of 260 chickens and ducks of suspected bird flu in the neighboring country.

"We have alerted our staff to make sure that they monitor the Congo border so that we don't have any birds coming from there, and secondly they have to report to us birds which are dying so that we can test them," William Olala Mukane, director of animal resources in the Ministry of Agriculture told Daily Monitor on Monday.

Uganda was thrown into panic when thousands of birds and poultry died in several districts of the country last week. Mukane, however, said the tests that were carried out showed no cases of bird flu.

He said cases that had been investigated showed that the birds were dying of New Castle disease and Gumbro, which kill chickens in large numbers.

Agricultural officials in the DRC announced the death of birds Thursday. Some 100 of the birds had died in a single day in Tshikapa, a town in the southern province of Kasai Occidental.

Avian influenza or bird flu is an infectious disease of birds caused by type A strains of the influenza virus, of which the highly pathogenic and most deadly H5N1 arouses huge concerns. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) lab confirmed cases, the H5N1 strain of bird flu virus has killed 97 people in several countries across Asia and Europe as the wild birds spread the virus along their migration journey.

Health experts agreed once the virus, now contracted by human through contact, may be able to pass between humans by mutation, resulting a global outbreak inevitable and possibly imminent which could claim millions of lives.

The WHO has been warning an outbreak of the epidemic in Africa could be catastrophic due to the venerable defense and poor health care system in the region. the WHO has called for global coordination to help Africa fight the virus.

Lee Jong-wook, the WHO director-general, urged African countries to develop, test and finance plans to reduce the risk of bird flu, and to prepare for a potential influenza pandemic after concluded a trip in Madagascar, Mauritius and Kenya earlier this month.

Lee noted in Nairobi that it is critical to limit the spread of H5N1 in animals, and the opportunities for this virus to be in contact with humans.

On his prescription for Africa, he asked the governments of African countries to acquire the ability to find, confirm and quickly report H5N1 in birds, wild or domestic; to be equipped to find, confirm and treat people who may be ill with this bird virus; and to be able to collect, examine and share virus samples from these people, in order to monitor the virus in case of mutations.

"Determine whether the virus is changing in any way, every country must have an avian influenza and human pandemic influenza preparedness plan," he noted.

In precaution, the Ugandan government has imported 1,000 doses of Tummy Flu, one of a few drugs that claimed to be effective on human patients of bird flu, and equipped its lab at Entebbe Virus Research Institute with a PCR H5N1 tester machine that can test bird flu and yield results in five hours. POULTRY BUSINESS SLASHED

UGACHICK, the leading chicken producer in Uganda, told state-owned New Vision daily the industry may lose up to 160 billion Ugandan shillings (87.9 million U.S. dollars) following the decline in demand of its products due to the bird flu scare.

"We produce 80,000 layers and 50,000 broilers which are hatched every Monday and Thursday. But customers are not buying due to fear of bird flu," Aga Ssekalala, the managing director said last week.

Lule Ssentumbe, the quality controller, said since the bird flu outbreak was reported in Europe, customers had decided to keep off, though Uganda health ministry officials tried to convince people there was no risk in eating well-cooked poultry products.

"About 30 percent of our customers have decided not to buy the chickens. This has affected us. We do not know how long this will go," Ssentumbwe said.

Sam Okware, the chairman of the National Task Force on Bird Flu, said Friday that if the disease hits Uganda and there is evidence that poultry died of the disease, the government would compensate farmers through the available scheme.

The practice echoed the call by the WHO, in Africa particularly, that immediate "on-the-spot" cash compensation to backyard poultry owners is necessary, otherwise, farmers will have no incentive to cull.

"We do not want Ugandans to panic, because since 1879, when the first bird flu case was recorded in Italy, less than 100 people world-wide have so far died from it. Eat chicken, do not starve yourselves," Okware said.