

AI – EU meeting

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EU health ministers to hold emergency meeting on bird flu

Health ministers of the European Union (EU) members and international experts will hold emergency talks on Friday in Vienne to seek measures to deal with the outbreaks of the deadly H5N1 bird flu virus, Austria's health minister said on Thursday.

Maria Rauch-Kallat, who will chair the talks, called for quick actions to bring anti-bird flu plans to an appropriate level, noting that EU-wide there are countries well-prepared for the outbreaks and also countries less well-prepare

The one-day meeting will focus on dispelling fears that bird flu is posing an imminent threat to humans, and highlighting the importance of prevention and awareness, officials close to the meeting said.

The Vienna meeting will also be attended by experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the Paris-based World Organization for Animal Health.

The participants are also to discuss progress in preparations against a possible human flu pandemic at the meeting, though there have been no human cases of the virus in the EU.

The talks came after French authorities sealed off a turkey farm Thursday which is suspected to have been infected by the H5N1 virus. If confirmed, it would mark the first time that the deadly strain has spread to domestic poultry in the EU.

In its most highly pathogenic form, the H5N1 virus has devastated poultry populations and killed at least 92 people, mostly in Asia, since 2003. The virus has already spread to 10 European countries.

Germany's agricultural authorities said on Thursday that 110 cases of the H5N1 infections had been confirmed in the country among wild birds.

While no EU farm birds have yet tested positive for the disease so far, experts have warned that it is only a matter of time for the virus to spread from wild birds to domestic poultry.

regards
Jill Bowis

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