

SUSPECTED CASES OF BIRD FLU EXPOSE INSUFFICIENT PUBLIC HEALTH AND CONTROL PROCEDURES IN IRAQ

Doctors for Iraq is deeply concerned about the recent suspected cases of bird flu in northern Iraq.

During the last ten days officials in the country reported that two youngsters had developed symptoms closely related to the human form of bird flu. One of the youngsters has since died from the virus.

An investigation is being carried out into the causes of the youngster's death and symptoms relating to bird flu. Other suspected cases of bird flu have since emerged in the south of Iraq.

Bird flu has been reported in neighbouring Turkey with suspected cases of the disease reported in one third of the Turkish governate. The virus has already claimed the lives of three children from the same family in Turkey.

Doctors For Iraq is concerned about the possibility of bird flu spreading into Iraq through the border with Turkey. Iraq is one of the most vulnerable countries in the region easily susceptible to the virus because of a number of reasons including:

- The lack of border controls and insufficient checks on poultry and meat entering the country.
- The migration of birds from Turkey to Iraq increasing the chances of the disease spreading.
- The shortage of equipment such as diagnostic lab examination kits, vaccines and medication to treat the disease.
- The lack of public health education to make the public aware of the potential threat of bird flu or advice on how to detect the potential signs of the disease. This is causing anxiety and confusion in the minds of many Iraqis who are unclear on how significant the threat is and how they can remain unhealthy.

Doctors For Iraq is calling for:

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) to provide support to the Iraqi Ministry of Health to establish a public health programme to highlight the causes of bird flu and how to remain safe from the virus. The WHO to provide diagnostic tools and testing kits to protect against the spread of the disease.
- For the Iraqi media to work alongside Doctors For Iraq to educate the public on this issue. Doctors For Iraq are planning a series of information workshops for doctors and medical professionals to educate them on the bird flu virus.
- The Iraqi Ministry of Health to co-operate with authorities on the borders to monitor and carry out health checks on good material entering the Iraq or neighbouring countries.
- Professional and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to focus on education and campaign work to raise awareness of this viral disease.

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