

Bird flu breaks out in China and Mexico

AUTHORITIES in China's remote northwestern region of Xinjiang have culled more than 150,000 chickens following an outbreak of bird flu, officials said yesterday.

The outbreak of the H5N1 strain of avian flu initially killed 1,600 chickens and sickened about 5,500, the agriculture ministry said.

In an effort to contain the disease, agricultural authorities quarantined the area and culled 156,439 chickens, according to the ministry.

The outbreak occurred on June 20 but was only confirmed as H5N1 bird flu yesterday, it said.

The ministry and state press did not specify exactly where the outbreak occurred, but said it happened at a farm run by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, described by state media as a semi-military government organisation of about 2.5 million people.

China is considered one of the nations most at risk of bird flu epidemics because it has the world's biggest poultry population and many chickens in rural areas are kept close to humans.

The last reported outbreak in mainland China was in April, when about 95,000

chickens were killed in the northern region of Ningxia.

Meanwhile, the Mexican government declared a national animal health emergency yesterday in the face of an aggressive bird flu epidemic that has infected nearly 1.7 million poultry.

More than half the infected birds have died or been culled, the agriculture ministry said of an epidemic that was confirmed on Friday by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

"We have activated a national animal health emergency... with the goal of diagnosing, preventing, controlling and eradicating the Type A, sub-type H7N3 bird flu virus," the ministry said.

Health officials keep a close watch on such outbreaks in Mexico since so-called swine flu began there in 2009. The H1N1 virus spread into a global pandemic that claimed the lives of 17,000 people.

The virus responsible for Mexico's current bird flu outbreak, H7N3, has occasionally caused human disease in various parts of the world, according to the UN, but has not shown itself to be easily transmittable between humans. — AFP