

Vietnam reissues bird flu poultry breeding ban

Vietnam's prime minister has reissued a poorly-observed ban on poultry breeding in cities, the government said Thursday, amid fears of new bird flu outbreaks in the coming winter season.

Nguyen Tan Dung also urged a shift from backyard farms to industrial poultry raising and hatching, and he urged local authorities to raise public vigilance about the killer virus, the government said on its official website.

Vietnam has reported only one recent bird flu outbreak, which killed five ducklings on a small private farm in southern Tra Vinh province this month, but experts warn the virus might come back in coming months.

"We are worried a new epidemic will spread nationwide because during this season outbreaks have happened in previous years," Bui Quang Anh, head of the national animal health department, told the Tin Tuc newspaper.

"The risk of an epidemic coming back is high because the weather is getting cooler, facilitating the existence and development of the virus," he said, adding that some provinces had reported unexplained poultry deaths.

Vietnam controlled the H5N1 virus with mass culls and vaccination campaigns when it was first hit by bird flu starting in 2003. In May this year, avian influenza again spread to 18 out of 64 provinces and municipalities.

Four people have been killed by bird flu this year in Vietnam, bringing the human death toll in the country to 46 since the virus first broke out.

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