

MINISTER COUGHLAN CALLS FOR CONTINUED VIGILANCE ON AVIAN INFLUENZA

The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mary Coughlan T.D., said today that the outbreak of avian influenza in Turkey provides demonstrable evidence of the need for continued vigilance against the introduction of the disease into Ireland.

The Minister pointed out, however, that the most recent events do not alter the risk of introducing the virus into Ireland. She added that her Department had not changed its advice to people travelling to Turkey and was not advising people to avoid particular parts of the country. She did, however, urge travellers to take sensible precautions and, in particular, to avoid contact with wild birds and live poultry and to avoid live bird markets, farms and other places that may be contaminated by bird faeces. The Minister said that the same advice applied to those travelling to any other affected country.

The Minister cautioned against any complacency and said that her Department was continuing to review its contingency arrangements, taking account of any new veterinary or scientific information, with a view to minimising any risk of introduction of the disease into the country and said that her Department wouldn't hesitate to introduce any such additional measures as were necessary to maintain Ireland's avian flu-free status. Minister Coughlan said that her Department had taken a very proactive approach to the threat posed by the virus. It had already taken a series of initiatives to reduce the risk of introducing the virus and, given the role played by migrating wild birds, it had put in place an early warning system, with the assistance of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Association of Regional Game Councils and BirdWatch Ireland.

As part of its contingency arrangements, the Department has also established a register for all domestic poultry flockowners and for those who own or trade in domestic poultry or other captive birds for sale or sporting purposes (including such enterprises as aviaries, pet farms, game clubs or pigeon breeders but not pet birds in domestic households).

The Minister said that she had been very encouraged by the response to the requirement for flockowners to register and urged those who had not yet registered to do so as soon as possible at their local Department of Agriculture and Food office or to contact the Department's avian influenza helpline at 01-6072512.

Minister Coughlan pointed out that the register would form a central part of the Department's effort to deal speedily with any disease outbreak by identifying the locations of all neighbouring flocks and would provide essential information in the event of the need to isolate particular flocks or if a cull of neighbouring flocks were required.

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Note for Editor

Matters relating to public health aspects of Avian Influenza should be addressed to the Department of Health and Children and the Health and Services Executive.