

# Confirmation awaited of first bird flu deaths in Europe

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The two teenagers, brother and sister, were admitted to hospital in Van in southeast Turkey on 1 January with symptoms resembling pneumonia. 14-year old Mehmet Ali Kocyigit passed away the next day, while his 13-year old sister Fatma passed away on 5 January. Initial tests suggest that both were infected with the H5N1 strain of avian influenza, say the Turkish authorities.

If the UK and WHO tests confirm the results of those carried out in Turkey, this will be the first time that a human being has died from bird flu outside Asia. Experts have emphasised that this is not the beginning of a pandemic, as this would require the virus to have been passed from human to human. The two youngsters are believed to have caught the virus from infected chickens at the farm on which they lived. The development does, however, bring the prospect of a pandemic to the periphery of Europe.

According to TurkishPress.Com a further seven people are currently being treated and monitored at Yuzuncu Yil University Medical Faculty.

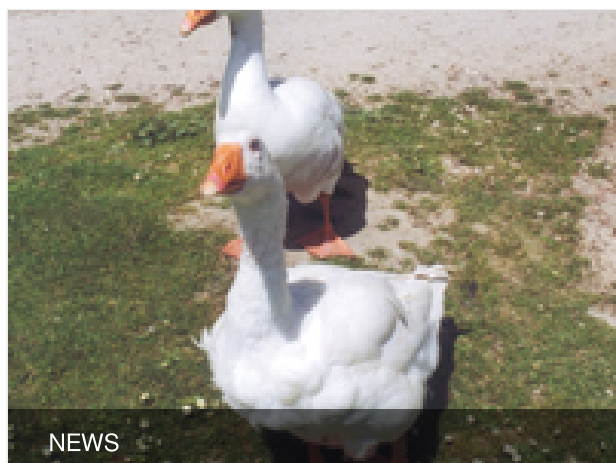
Turkey lies on the migration path of birds that fly westwards from Asia for the winter.

It is Asia that has thus far seen the worst of avian influenza, with over 70 people having died from the virus in the region.

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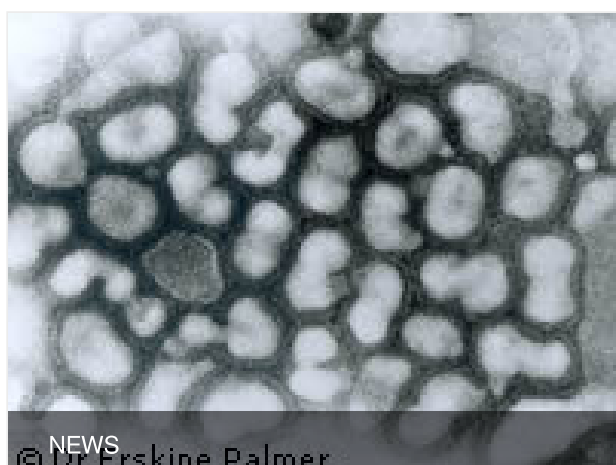
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**Last update:** 5 January 2006

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