

Deadly bird flu strain confirmed in Turkish Cyprus

13:31, January 30, 2006

The presence of the deadly H5N1 bird flu strain in the northern part of Cyprus has been confirmed, said the European Commission on Sunday.

The commission, the executive body of the European Union (EU), and the Turkish authorities have been informed by a bird flu laboratory of the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain in a sample taken from the area not under the effective control of the government of Cyprus.

The northern part of Cyprus is under Turkish control. The Greek part of Cyprus has joined the EU, which is in talks with Turkey on its accession to the 25-nation bloc.

The European commission said no live animals or animal products, including all poultry products and feathers, can be transferred across the Green Line, which separates the two parts of Cyprus, or to the EU.

The commission is sending two veterinary experts to Turkish Cyprus to investigate the epidemiology of the disease on the ground, said the commission.

The Cyprus island has been divided into the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities since 1974 after Turkey invaded and occupied the island in the wake of an abortive coup seeking union with Greece.

Anti-bird flu vaccine to be tested

(Jan. 30, 2006)

The National Institute of Infectious Diseases and vaccine manufacturers will start a clinical test of a vaccine made from a strain of bird flu as a countermeasure for a possible pandemic of new strains of influenza.

The institute and four vaccine manufacturers will start the test this month.

Vaccines against a new type of influenza can be manufactured only after its appearance. The institute estimates that the vaccine to combat the H5N1 strain of bird flu that has infected humans will be moderately effective in fighting a new type of flu.

According to the government's action plan to prevent a pandemic of a new bird flu strain, medical workers and those with serious diseases will be vaccinated against bird flu in an emergency. After the clinical test, the institute and the manufacturers will start producing the vaccine and stockpile it for use in an emergency.

Provided all goes well, the government will authorize the production of the vaccine next year. The manufacturers will begin preparations for the production in autumn, prior to receiving approval. The date was set as the manufacturing facilities cannot be used from April to September because normal flu vaccines are produced in that period.

They will use the H5N1 strain of bird flu that appeared in Vietnam for the clinical test. As flu strains can easily mutate, they plan to use the H5N1 strain of bird flu that infected people in Indonesia, which appeared more recently, to produce the vaccine.

It takes about a year to develop a vaccine against a new type of flu after its arrival.