

Culling chicken randomly is not the only way to control the spread of bird flu.



Extreme caution needs to be maintained by poultry farm workers as well as buyers so that the disease does not spread to humans.

Biosecurity is not the only way to avoid the disease from spreading, according to Hasan. The government could also approve the use of vaccinations for the decrease of the disease. "It's not possible to completely eliminate this virus but we can mitigate it by vaccinating the bird. Most poultry farms already have standard procedures of vaccinating for other diseases for chickens such as Gumbaro and Newcastle disease. It would end up reducing the risk of spreading and also protect our farm workers."

Haque also agrees that since it is becoming difficult to control the virus by culling chickens that the industry should find an alternative option such as vaccination. "Pakistan has detected four to five strains of the virus and has made four different strains of the vaccine," he says. "The problem is that it is not a vaccine that you just administer once. Rather there are at least 11-12 shots per bird. If we import this vaccine from abroad it becomes impractical and also expensive. The government should work towards developing a local vaccine which will be sold at a local rate."

The government, however, does not agree that vaccination is a viable option for eradicating this dangerous virus. "There are 16 different strains of this virus," says Khan. "And there have not been any cases where the vaccination of these birds were 100% successful or effective, be it Pakistan or Thailand or Malaysia. Another problem is that we might make the situation even worse. Right now the virus only passes on from bird to bird and sometimes, in the case of the people working in the farms or the wet markets, bird to human. There is a chance that when we vaccinate the birds we may unknowingly create a mutated strain which then makes the virus transferable from human to human."

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Contrary to popular belief *deshi* (non-farm) chickens may be just as vulnerable to the disease. Many farms are breeding the *sonali* chicken, which is a farm chicken grown to look like a *deshi* chicken. In addition, in many cases *deshi* chickens have a high immunity against the virus, but they can still be carriers. The virus, moreover, has been recently found in other birds such as ducks and crows, which is a dangerous sign. And it's not just one random incident. Over 400 crows have died in Dinajpur in two days, there are reports of crows lying dead in different places in Chittagong and over one hundred of them in the city's Dewanhat area. The reason for their death is unknown but suspected to be bird flu.