

Bird Flu News 16-18 March 2006

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Preliminary test results show H5N1 bird flu reaches Israel

2006-03-17 16:35:04



JERUSALEM, March 17 (Xinhuanet) -- Israeli health ministry sources said that preliminary test results showed that the deadly H5N1 strain of avian flu had reached Israel, local newspaper the Ha'aretz reported Friday.

There is no official confirmation yet.

More than 1,000 turkeys died on Thursday in two communities in the south of the country.

If the test results are confirmed, it will be the first bird flu outbreak in Israel.

Israel has geared up for any such possible outbreak, ordering that all the birds in the affected farms and nearby farms will be destroyed and that a quarantine will be imposed with a radius of 10 kilometers around the farms if the deadly virus is detected. The H5N1 strain of bird flu has already killed over 90 people worldwide since 2003 and led to the destruction of tens of millions of birds.

Experts fear that the disease, currently jumping from birds to humans through close contact, might mutate into a form that can easily pass among humans, leading to a global pandemic. The disease was detected in neighboring Egypt last month.

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Pakistan sends fresh samples to UK for bird flu tests

16 Mar 2006 11:07:37 GMT



KARACHI, March 16 (Reuters) - Pakistan has sent fresh samples of infected chickens to a British laboratory to test the presence of bird flu after detecting a mild avian flu strain in some flocks last month, a top farm official said on Thursday.

Pakistanis fear the dreaded H5N1 strain that can kill people as well as birds will be confirmed because outbreaks have occurred in neighbouring Afghanistan, India and Iran.

On Feb. 27, Pakistani farm authorities found low-pathogenic avian influenza in two farms in the towns of Abbotabad, 125 km (80 miles) north of Islamabad, and in Charsadda, 120 km to the northwest.

About 700 birds out of a total of 23,000 on both farms died after developing breathing problems, and the surviving birds were culled later.

Samples from the birds were sent to a laboratory in Britain for testing, and the laboratory has since requested fresh samples which were sent earlier this week, according to Dr. Muhammad Afzal, the country's Livestock Commissioner.

"We have not received any advisory or suggestion from them prior to their final finding," Afzal told Reuters, adding that the government was in touch with the laboratory.

The presence of an H5 subtype flu virus has already been confirmed, Afzal said but further tests were needed to confirm the subtype for the neuraminidase (or N) antigen component.

Food Secretary Muhammad Ismail Qureshi said the British laboratory was expected to issue its finding by the weekend.

The H5N1 strain has killed about 100 people since 2003 and the virus has spread rapidly in the past month in Europe, Africa and Asia.

Chicken consumption in Pakistan has plummeted and an article in The News daily headlined "Chickening out on bird flu" aired suspicions that the government was more concerned with protecting the poultry industry than people's health.

Source: Reuters

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Russia says bird flu may hit U.S. in autumn

16 Mar 2006 14:34:06 GMT

MOSCOW, March 16 (Reuters) - The deadly bird flu virus, which has hit Asia, Europe and Africa, may spread to the United States late this year and risks mutating dangerously there, Russia's top animal and plant health inspector said on Thursday.

"We think that H5N1 (strain of bird flu virus) will reach the United States in autumn," Sergei Dankvert told Reuters.

"This is very realistic. We may be almost certain this will happen after this strain is found in Great Britain, before autumn, as migrating birds will carry it to the United States from there."

He said there was also an opportunity of the virus spreading by fowl migrating from Siberia's Tyumen region to Alaska and mixing there with birds flying to Canada and to other parts of the United States.

"But we believe this is a longer route," Dankvert said.

"We forecast that bird flu mutation is possible in the countries where the number of different viruses is high. This group includes the United States," Dankvert added.

Bird flu has spread with alarming speed in recent weeks across Europe, Africa, and parts of Asia.

The U.S. government is treating avian flu as a scourge that will inevitably reach the United States and is preparing accordingly, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said this week. The virus occasionally infects people who have direct contact with infected birds and has killed around 100 people since late 2003.

Scientists fear that the virus may mutate into a form which could easily pass from one person to another, causing a pandemic, in which millions could die.

Source: Reuters

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Myanmar media acknowledges bird flu outbreak, finally

Mar 16, 2006, 15:39 GMT

Yangon - Myanmar's (Burma's) state controlled media on Thursday finally broke the news that outbreaks of avian influenza had been detected in the country, days after the development had been reported in the foreign press.

Myanmar's Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department issued a statement carried in all dailies that acknowledged that outbreaks of 'suspected avian influenza' had been detected in four districts since February.

'Starting from the first week of February to the early part of March, the outbreaks of chicken disease, suspected avian influenza, occurred in Shwebo Township, Kantbalu and Khinoo Townships in Sagaing Division and Pyigyidagun Township in Mandalay Division,' said the state ment.

The department attributed the spread of the virus to migratory birds. Myanmar borders Thailand and China, two countries where bird flu epidemics have been ravaging local poultry populations since late 2003.

Millions of poultry and some 97 people have died from bird flu worldwide since an outbreak of the deadly virus was first detected in late 2003.

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced on Monday that it had been informed by Myanmar's Livestock Breeding and Veterin ary Department of a possible outbreak of bird flu in a township near Mandalay.

But the same news was not reported in Myanmar's tightly controlled local press until Thursday, helping to fan rumours of a domestic avian influenza epidemic that immediately effected chicken sales and poultry transport.

The FAO has lauded the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department's response to the poultry plague.

In its statement printed in local papers the department confirmed that it had designated all four townships where the suspected bird flu outbreaks were detected as 'restricted zones,' controlling movements and temporarily closing down markets in the districts.

Myanmar has been under military rule since 1962, when U Ne Win came to power with a coup. Ne Win, who launched the country along its economically ruinous 'Burmerse Way to Socialism,' nationalized all industries including the media.

The post-Ne Win junta that has ruled Myanmar since 1988, when socialism was dropped, has nonetheless maintained totalitarian-style controls over the press.

Myanmar remains one of the most news-deprived societies in the world, with all media under the control of the military, and heavy restrictions placed on internet use, not to mention ownership of fax machines, computers and mobile phones.

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

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GM tomatoes may be key to bird flu fight

March 17, 2006 - 3:36PM

Genetically-modified tomatoes may become a key weapon in the global fight against bird flu.

Australian plant scientist Amanda Walmsley, of Melbourne's Monash University, is working on growing a vaccine against the deadly H5N1 virus in tomatoes.

Dr Walmsley, who has recently returned to Australia from the United States, was part of a team that developed the world's first plant-made vaccine to prevent a different disease that affects poultry.

That vaccine, for Newcastle Disease, was produced in tobacco plants.

She hopes to use similar techniques to develop an oral vaccine against bird flu in poultry.

It will involve introducing a gene from the H5N1 virus into the cells of tomato plants.

The gene would then tell the plant cells to produce a specific protein, found in bird flu, effectively making the tomatoes a factory for the vaccine.

Once birds were vaccinated, the protein would protect them if they came into contact with H5N1.

Dr Walmsley said the scientists planned to make a vaccine in injectable form first, and then trial oral and inhalable forms so that it could be delivered to poultry en masse.

She hopes to have a vaccine ready for preliminary testing in mice by the end of the year.

Bird flu has been sweeping the world's wild bird and poultry populations at an alarming speed.

The virus has spread to 37 nations on three continents, infecting 175 people, including 96 who have died.

Most of those were exposed to the virus through infected poultry.

But scientists are concerned about a possible pandemic if the virus mutates so it can easily be transmitted between humans.

A successful vaccine against the virus in poultry would reduce that risk.

Dr Walmsley said that eventually, the science may be used to test plant-made vaccines in humans.

"We would like to move towards that but, as you can imagine, it's a lot harder to get a vaccine approved for humans than it is for chickens," she said in an interview.

"We've reached the crawling stage in that we've got a plant-made vaccine out on the market, but we want to walk before we run.

"We're walking with the veterinary vaccines and then we'll try and get up and running with human vaccines.

"But there's a lot of regulatory and safety work we've yet to do to get to that stage."

Human vaccines are usually produced in eggs or yeast, making them unsuitable for people with egg allergies.

The bird flu project is being funded by the Australian Research Council and also involves scientists from Melbourne's Burnet Institute, the University of Melbourne, and Dow AgroSciences in the United States.

AAP

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Israel to Kill Flocks After Bird Flu Test

Mar 17, 2006

JERUSALEM (AP)— Israeli officials ordered the destruction of turkey flocks in three farming communities following bird flu tests, the Agriculture Ministry said Friday.



A dead turkey is seen in a chicken coup at a farm in the village of Ein Hashlosa, southern Israel, where hundreds of turkeys were found dead Thursday, March 16, 2006. Israel's agriculture minister Zeev Boim said Thursday that the widespread death of turkeys at two communities in southern Israel could have been caused by the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu. The outbreak, if confirmed, would be the first case of the virus in Israel. (AP Photo)

Meanwhile, three people from one of those communities have been admitted to a southern Israeli hospital on suspicion of contracting the virus.

There has been no official confirmation of a first outbreak in Israel of the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu. But preliminary tests after 11,000 turkeys died indicate "a very high chance that this is avian flu," Health Minister Yaakov Edri said Friday.

The Associated Press.

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Egyptian woman dies of bird flu

Sat Mar 18, 2006 7:45 AM ET



CAIRO (Reuters) - A 30-year-old Egyptian woman has died of bird flu, the country's first human victim of the virus, Egypt's health ministry said on Saturday.

It said the woman from Qaloubiyah province, about 40 kms (25 miles) north of Cairo, where the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain has been detected in poultry, was taken ill on Wednesday.

"They (doctors) took samples for analysis at the ministry of health

laboratories ... They confirmed she was infected with bird flu. She died on Friday morning," a health ministry statement said, adding the woman had been given Tamiflu, a drug used to treat suspected cases of bird flu.

Israel said on Saturday that four poultry workers suspected of having bird flu had tested negative for the virus, after the country detected its first cases of H5N1 in birds on Friday.

Bird flu has spread across Europe, Africa and parts of Asia and killed at least 98 people worldwide since 2003.

Although hard to catch, people can contract bird flu after coming into contact with infected birds. Scientists fear the virus could mutate into a form that could pass easily between humans, triggering a pandemic in which millions could die.

The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that Egypt had reported its first human case of bird flu.

Dr Hassan al-Bushra, WHO's regional adviser for communicable diseases surveillance, said the H5N1 bird flu virus had been found in a blood sample taken from the woman, and that other samples were being tested for further confirmation.

Egypt reported its first cases of bird flu in poultry flocks last month. Media and state reports say H5N1 has now been detected in at least 17 of Egypt's 26 governorates and the city of Luxor.

Egyptian farmers say the poultry market -- worth about 17 billion Egyptian pounds (\$3 billion dollars) and supporting up to 3 million people -- has been devastated.

By Mohammed Abbas

Congo Has Suspected Avian Flu Outbreak, United Nations Says

2006-03-18 06:48 (New York)



March 18 (Bloomberg) -- Democratic Republic of Congo officials suspect at least 260 chickens and ducks may have died of bird flu, the United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network said, citing Agriculture Minister Constant Ndom Nda.

About 100 of the birds died March 16 in Tshikapa, a town in the south-central province of Kasai Occidental, the UN agency said on its Web site today. The dead birds could not be tested because they "had all been eaten," it quoted Agriculture Permanent Secretary Ali Ramazani as saying.

Dead pigeons found in the capital Kinshasa have been sent to South Africa for testing, IRIN said.

Since 2003, the H5N1 avian influenza virus has killed at least 98 of 177 people infected, the World Health Organization said March 13. Nigeria reported Africa's first outbreak last month.

By Brian Latham

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