

Bird Flu News 17 – 19 April 2006

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Bush preparing to approve bird flu plan

17 April 2006

WASHINGTON Federal officials say the first case of bird flu could show up in the U-S in the coming months or even weeks as birds migrate from overseas.

And the government is now finalizing a plan that lays out how agencies should respond if it were transmitted to humans.

It recognizes that people may need to avoid human contact and stay home from work, school and other large gathering places.

So, the plan proposes that other countries make U-S money if domestic locations cannot operate. And it anticipates that Internet capacity could be strained while employees work from home computers.

The plan also lays out who should receive the initial vaccinations.

The government is assuming a worst-case scenario in which as many as 90 (m) million Americans would become sick and two (m) million people would die during a worldwide flu pandemic.

Source – AP

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Flu: Bhopal lab under strain

Monday, April 17, 2006 11:49:38 pm

NEW DELHI: Scientists at Bhopal's High Security Animal Diseases Laboratory are facing a serious problem because untrained field officials collecting blood samples of dead birds in various states have not been preserving the samples properly, before sending them to the lab for testing.

The result – thousands of spoilt samples that are of no use. Now, all 14 scientists of the lab, who have been working exclusively on India's bird flu programme, having shelved their other projects, are not only testing samples but also sorting them, leading to a huge waste of time.

According to sources, last week the lab received 2,300 bird samples from Kerala, all of which had fungus. Just three days back, scientists spent eight hours just sorting out good samples from the bad ones, sent to them from Maharashtra, MP and Karnataka. Over 4,661 samples were found spoilt.

The lab's chief HK Pradhan, told TOI, "My entire staff has been working on just testing samples for bird flu. We are under tremendous pressure. States are sending hundreds of samples everyday.

Collectors aren't following the guidelines to preserve the samples. Many of them aren't even trained. They are just told to meet a target. This way, we are wasting precious time in our fight against the virus."

The Bhopal laboratory is the only one in India carrying out tests for the H5N1 strain of bird flu. The facility, manned by 14 researchers, is testing over 3,000 bird samples each week.

The lab is also asking states to stop sending serum samples for testing. "We want states to send us tissue and faecal samples. H5N1 kills birds in a very short time and the body does not get time to produce antibodies. That's why testing serum samples are of no good."

TIMES NEWS NETWORK - Kounteya Sinha

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Ill-equipped South Asia looks resigned to bird flu

17 April 2006

MUMBAI - Bird flu is spreading across one of the most crowded places on earth and, far from being brought under control, looks almost certain to remain a long-term menace in South Asian poultry, officials say.

Since February, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Myanmar have culled hundreds of thousands of chickens and shut poultry farms, yet the virus has kept spreading to new areas.

Surprisingly, no humans are known to have been infected in South Asia, where hundreds of millions in the countryside live with their livestock.

But fears over the H5N1 flu virus have slashed demand for chicken meat and eggs, ruining the livelihoods of countless workers in India's \$7.8 billion poultry industry and even leading to the suicides of nine Indian farmers, an industry group said.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and some Indian officials say that once the virus takes hold in any country -- developed or not -- it is just about impossible to eradicate.

"Has any disease which has come in the last 50 years into India gone away?" said H.K. Pradhan, head of India's only animal diseases laboratory that carries out tests for bird flu.

Worse still is a lack of laboratories, trained veterinary personnel and ignorance about the disease.

Officials admit they face an uphill battle against bird flu, which experts fear could mutate and spread easily from person to person, triggering a pandemic.

In a region where many have little or no access to stretched health services, a mutated strain could spread rapidly among humans, leaving countless numbers of people to fend for themselves.

While officials might feel a sense of crisis, the reaction of many ordinary people is slowly turning from panic to cautious resignation.

In a region of more than 1.3 billion people, bird flu is just one of many threats they face as they try to overcome poverty, the danger of other illnesses, militancy and natural disasters.

"I hope bird flu does not become part of our lives," said Faiz Qureshi, a young restaurant owner in New Delhi.

"There are car accidents in the streets everyday, but people don't stop driving, do they?" he said, surveying his almost empty restaurant known for chicken and mutton dishes.

In Pakistan, a small number of people, mostly in cities, have stopped eating chickens but the majority seems indifferent to the disease and chicken sales are largely normal.

"I am not convinced there is bird flu in Pakistan. It has all to do with the media," said Shahina Munawar, a Karachi housewife.

Mind the gap

India, with 1.1 billion people, is trying to stamp out its fourth outbreak since February and has culled about 500,000 birds and destroyed nearly two million eggs mostly in the country's west.

But the WHO says the gap between reporting dead birds, laboratory confirmation and action on the ground in India was large at about 15 days.

"The gap in reporting dead birds and results of blood samples delays immediate action on the ground and bird flu may spread to further areas," Subhash Salunke, WHO South Asia regional adviser, told Reuters.

Much of the region's poultry industry is unorganised. In Afghanistan, years of war and insurgency, a difficult terrain and shambolic infrastructure have hampered efforts to fight bird flu.

"Bird flu is going on and the killing of chickens and quarantine procedures are going on," said Azizullah Osmani, a senior Afghan agriculture ministry official.

Afghanistan has confirmed H5N1 in a third province and suspects it has been found in two more, a U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation official said on Thursday.

In neighbouring Pakistan, officials say the H5N1 strain was found in two poultry flocks and after culling around 23,000 birds it has not resurfaced.

"Apparently, the situation is under control, but we are uncertain on many points and cannot be dead sure that we have controlled this problem," said Muhammad Afzal, Pakistan's livestock commissioner.

"We also lack proper equipment and trained people to check those farms, so the suspicion is that it could be hidden somewhere, in some farm."

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have so far been lucky despite their proximity to India but both have closely monitored migratory birds and possible smuggling of poultry from infected countries.

With migratory birds heading back to Central Asia, Sri Lanka could get some relief for a few months, but smuggled poultry remains a worry for the country as well.

There are also serious concerns about Myanmar. U.N. officials say the country's secretive military regime is facing more than 100 outbreaks in poultry but so far the government has been cooperating with U.N. teams on the ground.

Source - Reuters

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Nigeria records fresh bird flu outbreak

April 18, 2006



Fresh outbreak of bird flu that has killed 200 birds has been recorded in Bakori in Nigeria's northern state of Katsina, the official News Agency of Nigeria reported on Monday.

Alhaji Halliru Atiku, head of the agriculture department of the Bakori local government was quoted as saying that the disease was discovered in Bakori and Jargaba towns, about 280 km north from the Nigerian capital Abuja.

He said the local governments had taken measures including aggressive enlightenment campaigns to prevent the spread of the disease to other parts.

He added that the Katsina State Committee on Prevention and Control of Bird Flu had provided chemicals to disinfect the poultry farms in the areas. The outbreak came a week after the Nigerian federal government paid a compensation of 1.7 million naira (about 13,000 U.S. dollars) to poultry farmers who lost their birds to the disease in the state.

The epidemic has now been confirmed in 13 of Nigeria's 36 states plus the federal capital territory Abuja, but no human case has been detected so far in the country.

Nigeria is the first in Africa to report the presence of the H5N1 virus and has blamed illegal imports of poultry for the outbreak.

Source: Xinhua

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Will we ever be rid of bird flu?

Tuesday, 18-Apr-2006

Experts say that the rapid spread of bird flu in India will be impossible to eradicate and is certain to remain a long-term threat in many areas.

In the last two months India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Myanmar have culled hundreds of thousands of chickens and shut poultry farms, yet the virus continues to spread to new areas.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said that once the virus gets a grip in a country it is difficult to halt the spread.

To date no humans are known to have been infected in South Asia, where hundreds of millions in the countryside live with their poultry in their yards, but anxiety over the virus has meant demand for chicken meat and eggs has plummeted and destroyed the livelihoods of many.

According to some reports the devastation of India's \$7.8 billion poultry industry has led to the suicides of some Indian farmers.

India has a population of 1.1 billion people and is currently attempting to eradicate its fourth outbreak since February.

It has culled some 500,000 birds and destroyed nearly two million eggs mostly in the country's west but much of the region's poultry industry is unorganised.

Indian officials say that a lack of laboratories, trained veterinary personnel and ignorance about the disease means that once a disease takes hold in the country it never goes away and admit they face an uphill battle against bird flu.

Experts have long feared the virus will mutate and acquire the ability to spread easily from person to person, triggering a pandemic.

In regions where many have little or no access to already strained health services, such a virus would spread like wildfire among humans with no line of defence.

Indian officials are aware of a sense of crisis, but many ordinary people are now almost resigned to the inevitable and regard it as just one of many threats they face as they face a daily struggle to survive.

The WHO says the gap between reporting dead birds and action on the ground in India is around 15 days and that means bird flu may spread to other areas.

In Afghanistan the H5N1 virus has been confirmed in three provinces and the on-going war and insurgency, a difficult terrain and shambolic infrastructure have hampered efforts to fight it.

Neighbour Pakistan, has found the H5N1 strain in two poultry flocks and after culling around 23,000 birds the situation appears to be under control, while to date Bangladesh and Sri Lanka despite their proximity to India, have remained clear.

Both countries have closely monitored migratory birds and the possible smuggling of poultry from infected countries, which remains a major concern in many areas.

U.N. officials have expressed grave concern about Myanmar and say the country's secretive military regime is now facing more than 100 outbreaks in poultry.

The government has apparently been cooperating with U.N. teams.

Source: www.news-medical.net

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China reports another human case of bird flu

2006-04-18 20:34:22

BEIJING, April 18 (Xinhua) -- A 21-year-old man in central China's Hubei Province has been infected with H5N1 bird flu and is now in a critical condition, the Ministry of Health said on Tuesday.

The man, surnamed Lai, is a migrant worker in Wuhan, capital city of Hubei. He showed symptoms of fever and pneumonia on April 1 and was hospitalized, said a report released by the ministry.

The patient has been confirmed to be infected with bird flu in accordance with the standards of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Chinese official standards, the ministry said.

Those who have had close contact with Lai have been put under medical observation by local health authorities. So far, no abnormal symptoms have been reported.

The ministry has reported the new case to the WHO and the regions of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, as well as several other countries.

The case brings the total number of human cases of bird flu in China to 17, which have resulted in 11 deaths.

Editor: Lu Hui, www.chinaview.cn

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Sudan reports first bird flu cases

Wednesday 19 April 2006



The infections were found in Khartoum and Jazeera province

One man and five chickens have been found with the bird flu virus in Sudan, the health ministry says. Magdi Salih, the head of the epidemics department, said on Tuesday that tests carried out by Sudanese authorities on the man and chickens had proved positive for bird flu, but he did not say if the virus was the deadly H5N1 strain.

The infected chickens were found at two farms in Sudan's Khartoum and Jazeera provinces, one of which belonged to the infected man.

Samples would be sent abroad for further tests, Salih said.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said it was looking into the report.

"We don't have a lot of details as to what kinds of tests were done, but we are obviously keen to have the samples sent abroad," spokeswoman Maria Cheng said.

The H5N1 strain of bird flu has been confirmed in neighbouring Egypt, which has reported four human deaths from the virus.

Bird flu has killed at least 109 people in nine countries, according to the most recent WHO figures.

The virus remains essentially an animal disease, but there are fears it could mutate into a form which passes easily among people, sparking a pandemic in which millions could die.

Editor: Liu Dan, www.chinaview.cn

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Vietnam faces risk of bird flu reoccurrence

2006-04-19 11:39:10

HANOI, April 19 (Xinhua) -- Vietnam is encountering high risk of bird flu return, partly because only 40 percent of ducks and 60 percent of chickens in the country's southern Mekong Delta have immunity to the disease after being vaccinated, local media reported Wednesday.

The risk is also due to loosen control over slaughter, trade and transport of poultry and related products in some localities, including border provinces, Vietnam Agriculture newspaper quoted a report of the country's National Anti-Bird flu Steering Committee.

Vietnam has conducted bird flu vaccination among 33 million fowls in 30 cities and provinces nationwide since late February.

In 2005, bird flu hit 44 cities and provinces of Vietnam, killing and leading to the forced culling of nearly 4.8 million poultry, or over 2 percent of the country's fowl population, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The country, which now has a total poultry population of nearly 220 million, has detected no bird flu outbreaks for over four months, said the ministry. Enditem

Editor: Chen Feng, www.chinaview.cn

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