

Bird Flu News 19-21 March 2006

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Egypt reports second human case of bird flu

19/03/2006 - 18:11:28

Egypt reported its second human case of avian flu today while Israel continued its precautionary culling of hundreds of thousands of birds.

Neighbouring Jordan, which is so far free of the deadly H5N1 strain, responded to the developments by stepping up measures against the virus.

A 30-year-old Egyptian man, who worked on a chicken farm in the province of Qalyoubiya, was the second human infected by the virus in Egypt, the Health Ministry said.

The man was recovering in the hospital after being admitted on Thursday with a fever, Deputy Health Minister Nasser el-Sayyed said.

Police identified the man as Mohammed Bahaeddin Abdel-Menem from the village of Noqbas.

Villagers were uneasy after the announcement.

Ibrahim al-Gazzar, a cousin of the latest victim, said he doubted that other villagers were educated enough to seek medical treatment. "They would think it was a normal flu – that will be a disaster."

Um Mohammed, a 35-year-old widow and mother of two, said that although she had told authorities that her birds were dying, "They did nothing to help me."

"Day after day, I watched my chickens die. I felt as though I was handcuffed," she said.

The country's first known human case, a woman who died on Friday, was from the same province, north of Cairo. The two victims had not had any contact and were from different villages, el-Sayyed told The Associated Press.

The Egypt-based US Naval Medical Research was conducting additional tests to confirm whether the case was H5N1, the Health Ministry said in a statement run by the state Middle East News Agency.

Egypt continues to import Tamiflu and will have stockpiled 500,000 capsules by the end of September, Health Minister Hatem el-Gabali said.

Egypt discovered its first cases of the virus in birds last month.

Turkey and Iraq are the only other Middle Eastern countries where humans have died of the virus.

Israeli veterinary officials proceeded with the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of birds as new tests came close to confirming Israel's first outbreak of the deadly bird flu. The alert was raised on Wednesday when thousands of turkeys started dying.

Agriculture Ministry spokeswoman Dafna Varisca said "it's very close to 100%" sure that the virus has spread to Israel.

Devoting today's weekly Cabinet meeting to the apparent outbreak, acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert pledged to form a task force to handle compensating farmers for their losses. Damage is expected to run into millions of dollars.

Olmert told the Cabinet that nothing indicated that the disease had spread to humans.

Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said Israeli military officials have been in touch with the Palestinians, and there was no indication that bird flu had spread to the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

Jordanian Health Minister Saeed Darwazeh declared that the country was still free of the H5N1 virus.

Nonetheless, it was stepping up its monitoring efforts by visiting farms and looking for any increase in poultry deaths, said Adel al-Balbissi, director of the unit for combating bird flu at Jordan's Centre for Disease Control.

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Bird Flu Is Underreported in Africa, Allowing Spread, AFP Says

2006-03-19 20:43 (New York)

March 20 (Bloomberg) -- Bird flu has affected more countries in Africa than the four nations that have officially reported outbreaks, and reluctance to publicly disclose infections is contributing to the virus's spread, Agence France-Presse reported, citing a World Health Organization official.

Nigeria, Egypt, Niger and Cameroon are the only countries that "dared announce their results," AFP quoted Andre Ndikuyeze, the WHO's representative in Gabon, as saying. "Others haven't been so brave and have not taken the necessary steps, which is another factor in the spread of the epidemic."

Representatives from the WHO, the United Nations, aid organizations and governments are scheduled to meet in Gabon today for three days of talks aimed at galvanizing a pan-African response to avian influenza, the AFP report said.

Agence France-Presse 3-19

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17,000 bird flu poultry deaths in south Russia in last 24 hours

09:55 | 20/03/2006



ROSTOV-ON-DON, March 20 (RIA Novosti, Sergei Rudkovsky) - More than 17,000 birds have died of bird flu in southern Russia in the last 24 hours, an official said Monday.

"In the Krasnodar Territory, 17,128 chickens have died over the last 24 hours, and the total number of dead birds has reached 420,388," the official said.

An Emergency Situations Ministry center in the region said that since March 13, when vaccination of birds against the virus started, some 1.28 million birds had been inoculated in the Krasnodar Territory, along with 1.25 million in Dagestan and 320,800 in the North Caucasus republic of Kabardino-Balkaria.

About 327,000 birds have been vaccinated in the Republic of Kalmykia in southern European Russia since March 14, and 810,000 in the Stavropol Territory since March 11.

A new wave of bird flu struck Russia on February 3 following outbreaks last year. The country's southern regions, where all cases in the country have so far been registered, are particularly vulnerable as they are a stopover for migrating birds.

No human deaths from bird flu have so far been registered in Russia.

RIA Novosti

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Denmark confirm nine more cases of bird flu

20/03/2006 - 14:35:36

Denmark today confirmed nine more cases of birds infected with H5N1 bird flu, four days after the deadly strain was first detected in the country.

Tests on nine wild tufted ducks found dead on the island of Aeroe showed they carried the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of the virus, the Danish Institute for Food and Veterinary Research said.

Authorities established a protection zone on the small island, located about 105 miles south-west of the capital, Copenhagen, when initial tests on Friday indicated the birds carried the disease.

Denmark confirmed its first case of H5N1 on Thursday, when a buzzard tested positive. Samples were sent to the European Union reference laboratory in Britain for verification.

The H5N1 virus has killed at least 98 people in Asia, the Middle East and Turkey since 2003, according to the World Health Organisation. Experts fear it may mutate into a form passed easily between people and spark a pandemic.

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WHO Suspects 14 People Infected with Bird Flu in Azerbaijan

20.03.2006 16:56 MSK (GMT +3)

Experts from the World Health Organization suspect 14 more people are infected with bird flu in Azerbaijan where two girls died of the the H5N1 virus earlier this month, Interfax reported Monday.



A group of WHO experts reported their suspicions after visiting the Salyansky district of Azerbaijan, 150 km to the south of the capital Baku.

Earlier three residents of the district were provisionally diagnosed with bird flu.

Meanwhile, the state commission for preventing the spread of bird flu in Azerbaijan and coordinating the work of relevant government bodies has issued a statement that

says no new areas of bird flu outbreak have been discovered, Regnum news agency said.

"Bird flu has not been discovered in new areas. The Health Ministry has said no-one has been hospitalized [with suspected bird flu] in recent days, and that it has stockpiled the medications and disinfectants necessary to prevent and treat the bird flu virus," the statement read.

MosNews

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U.S. study defines two clear bird flu strains

20 Mar 2006 14:02:08 GMT

ATLANTA, March 20 (Reuters) - The H5N1 strain of bird flu in humans has evolved into two separate strains, U.S. researchers reported on Monday, which could complicate developing a vaccine and preventing a pandemic.

One strain, or clade, made people sick in Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand in 2003 and 2004 and a second, a cousin of the first, caused the disease in people in Indonesia in 2004.

Two clades may share the same ancestor but are distinct -- as are different clades, or strains, of the AIDS virus, the team from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found.

"Back in 2003 we only had one genetically distinct population of H5N1 with the potential to cause a human pandemic. Now we have two," said the CDC's Rebecca Garten, who helped conduct the study.

Speaking to the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases in Atlanta, Garten said the pool of H5N1 candidates with the potential to cause a human influenza pandemic is getting more genetically diverse, which makes studying the virus more complex and heightens the need for increased surveillance.

"As the virus continues its geographic expansion, it is also undergoing genetic diversity expansion," Garten said in a statement.

The H5N1 strain of bird flu has spread across Europe, Africa and parts of Asia and killed about 100 people worldwide and infected about 180 since it re-emerged in 2003.

Although it is difficult to catch bird flu, people can become infected if they come into close 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.

All influenza viruses mutate easily, and H5N1 appears to be no exception.

"Only time will tell whether the virus evolves or mutates in such a way that it can be transmitted from human to human efficiently," Garten said.

The U.S. Health and Human Services Department has already recognized the two strains and approved the development of a second H5N1 vaccine based on the second clade.

Several companies are working on H5N1 vaccines experimentally, although current formulations are not expected to protect very well, if at all, against any pandemic strain.

A vaccine against a pandemic flu strain would have to be formulated using the actual virus passing from person to person.

For their study, Garten and colleagues analyzed more than 300 H5N1 virus samples taken from both infected birds and people 2003 through the summer of 2005.

The majority of the viruses, including all the human cases, belonged to genotype Z. Now there are two clades of the Z genotype. There were also small numbers of viruses in birds that were genotype V or W or recently identified genotype G.

Source: Reuters

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Bird Flu Spreads in Cameroon, May Have Infected Third Egyptian

March 21 (Bloomberg) -- Hundreds of dead birds found on a poultry farm in southern Cameroon may signal bird flu is spreading in the West African nation. A third person in Egypt is reported to have been tested for the lethal virus.

About 240 dead birds were found in the coastal town of Limbe, near the Nigerian border and several hundred kilometers from the northern town of Maroua, where Cameroon's first outbreak was confirmed in a duck, the United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network reported yesterday. Agriculture Minister Aboubakary Sarki is visiting northern provinces to review control measures, the report said.

Twenty new outbreaks in poultry of the H5N1 avian influenza strain were reported to the World Organization for Animal Health in the week ending March 16, boosted by infections on farms in Nigeria and Romania. The disease in poultry raises the risk of human cases and creates opportunities for the virus to mutate into a pandemic form that may kill millions of people.

"Nations are dealing with this on their own because of fears of an impact on trade," said Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association. "We continue to see situations where nations are not as aggressive as they could be off the bat."

Israel last week became the 29th country this year to report an initial H5N1 outbreak in either wild birds or fowl.

Since 2003, H5N1 has killed at least 98 of 177 people infected, the WHO said on March 13. The human toll from avian flu may increase as results on tests from suspected fatalities in Egypt and Azerbaijan are reported this week.

Third Egyptian

A third Egyptian may have been infected with H5N1, Agence France-Press reported, citing Health Minister Hatem al-Gabali.

The Ministry of Health in Egypt confirmed the country's first human avian flu fatality in a 30-year-old woman who died near Cairo on March 17. Samples from the woman tested positive by the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit based in Cairo.

Samples are being sent abroad for diagnostic verification and further analysis by a WHO laboratory, the WHO said.

More human cases are expected to be found in Egypt, the government said in a statement on its Web site, citing Ibrahim el-Kirdani, a WHO spokesman. The virus has sickened birds in 18 of Egypt's 26 regions.

The H5N1 virus already is changing into more variations with genetic characteristics that increase the risk of infection in humans, according to a U.S. government study.

Researchers are finding more human cases of the disease caused by one of the variants that had only been seen in birds before 2005, said Rebecca Garten, a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention scientist, who led the study. The research was presented yesterday at the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases in Atlanta.

“The genetic evolution we’re observing is very worrisome. The threat is real,” Benjamin said. “It’s already a pandemic in birds.”

Malaysia has third state infected with bird flu

March 21, 2006



Malaysia on Monday confirmed a bird flu case in the state of Penang, the third state hit by the epidemic in the country this year.

Six free-range chickens found dead in a village in Seberang Perai Utara last Saturday have been confirmed to be infected with the H5N1 strain of virus, said Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

"I have to make this statement because we do not want to be perceived as trying to cover it up or hide it," Muhyiddin told reporters in Perak, adding the new cases involved no human infections.

Local health authorities will begin culling poultry within one km radius of the infected area Monday night, he said.

Expressing his hope that the latest case in Penang would be the last in this country, Muhyiddin said authorities would study the trend of the spread of the disease and work out the best way to fight it.

Last Thursday, health authorities confirmed two separate bird flu cases in a village and an ecopark in the northern state of Perak.

In mid February, 40 free-range chickens at a few settlements near Capital Kuala Lumpur also died of avian influenza.

Source: Xinhua

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