

## Bird Flu News 20-23 Feb 2006

CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF CONFIRMED HUMAN CASES OF AVIAN INFLUENZA A/(H5N1) REPORTED TO WHO .....	1
INDIA CALLS FOR CALM AS IT FIGHTS BIRD FLU OUTBREAK .....	1
BIRD FLU SPREADS, INDIA TESTS DOZENS OF PEOPLE .....	2
FIRST BIRD FLU CASES IN INDIA MOTIVATE BIRD CULL .....	3
BIRD FLU COULD HOBBLE AFRICA'S AIDS FIGHT .....	4
AVIAN INFLUENZA: SIGNIFICANCE OF MUTATIONS IN THE H5N1 VIRUS .....	4
AVIAN INFLUENZA –SPREAD OF THE VIRUS TO NEW COUNTRIES .....	6
BIRD FLU FOUND IN INDIA, MALAYSIA PROMPTS IMPORT BANS (UPDATE 4).....	7
AVIAN INFLUENZA - SITUATION IN NIGERIA - UPDATE .....	8
BIRD FLU MOST LIKELY IN AUSTRALIA, SCIENTISTS SAY .....	9
TWO MORE BIRD FLU SUSPECTS HOSPITALISED .....	10

### Cumulative Number of Confirmed Human Cases of Avian Influenza A/(H5N1) Reported to WHO

20 February 2006

Country	2003		2004		2005		2006		Total	
	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths
<b>Cambodia</b>	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>China</b>	0	0	0	0	8	5	4	3	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Indonesia</b>	0	0	0	0	17	11	9	8	<b>26</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	0	0	17	12	5	2	0	0	<b>22</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Turkey</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	4	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Viet Nam</b>	3	3	29	20	61	19	0	0	<b>93</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>92</b>

Total number of cases includes number of deaths.  
WHO reports only laboratory-confirmed cases.

[Back to Index](#)

### India calls for calm as it fights bird flu outbreak

Published: February 20 2006 02:00

By Anita Jain in New Delhi

The Indian government scrambled to cope with its first confirmed avian flu infections at the weekend, culling 900,000 chickens in the west of the country where the infected samples were found and preparing to dispatch anti-bird flu drugs to affected areas.

On Saturday, Indian officials confirmed the H5N1 avian flu virus had been found in samples taken from dead chickens in northern Maharashtra following the deaths of some 50,000 chickens in the area in the past few days.

The government has sent 750,000 doses of bird vaccine to the Nandurbar district in northern Maharashtra, about 450km from Mumbai.

At least five people have been diagnosed with bird flu symptoms and there are reports of one possible human death from the virus in western Maharashtra.

The government called on people not to panic, saying it had taken all adequate precautions to segregate healthy from infected birds and had ordered more stocks of oseltamivir, the human anti-influenza drug marketed by Roche as Tamiflu.

Anbumani Ramadoss, health minister, said nearly every bird in the affected area would be vaccinated. "There is absolutely no need to panic. The situation is under control. We have sufficient medicines".

With the rapid spread of avian flu across western Europe and Africa, the health ministry began stockpiling oseltamivir two weeks ago.

The government is likely to look to the country's pharmaceutical industry, one of the world's largest in the generic drugs sector, to help prevent outbreaks of the deadly virus.

Hyderabad-based Hetero Drugs told a local newspaper it had supplied 500,000 doses of oseltamivir to the government last week. Another 1m were under production.

Cipla, a Mumbai-based pharmaceutical company, said it had 1m doses of a generic anti-flu drug.

[Back to Index](#)

## Bird flu spreads, India tests dozens of people

*Monday, February 20, 2006*

MUMBAI: India said it was testing dozens of people for bird flu on Sunday.

The Indian government said on Sunday that earlier fears of the country's first human victim were unfounded, after 'preliminary' tests on a dead farmer showed he was not affected. "Preliminary investigations by the rapid response teams at Navapur indicate that this patient had no exposure to poultry," a federal health ministry statement said.

Earlier, the top administrator of Surat district in India's western Gujarat state and the state's health minister had told Reuters that a poultry farmer had died of "suspected bird flu".

"A poultry farm owner died on Friday in Surat district. Local tests have confirmed bird flu but we have sent samples to the national laboratory. A final report is awaited," Vatsala Vasudev, the top administrator of Surat, told Reuters. "There are, however, no reports of any human cases of avian influenza," the government statement said.

The statement said as of Saturday, there were six cases of "upper respiratory tract infection with mild fever who have history of poultry deaths in their backyard farms" from Navapur. It added that "none of these cases have any pneumonia." Avian influenza has flared anew in recent weeks, spreading among birds in Europe and parts of Africa, and prompting authorities to impose bans on the poultry trade, introduce mass culling and vaccinate poultry flocks.

In India, officials launched an emergency campaign to try to contain the virus, which experts fear might mutate to allow it to pass between people, potentially triggering a pandemic. Another official said blood samples of 30 people from bird flu-hit Nandurbar district in western Maharashtra state had been sent for testing for the H5N1 virus, a top official told Reuters.

“All these people were showing flu-like symptoms and we have sent their blood and sputum samples for testing for bird flu,” said Vijay Satbir Singh, the state’s top health official, said.

India, the world’s second most populous nation and a major poultry producer, reported its first bird flu cases in poultry on Saturday, after 50,000 birds died in Maharashtra. Bird flu is also threatening livelihoods by slashing demand for poultry in Europe, Nigeria and parts of India.

– Reuters

[Back to Index](#)

## First bird flu cases in India motivate bird cull

AM - Monday, 20 February, 2006 08:16:00

Reporter: Geoff Thompson

TONY EASTLEY: A huge cull of birds is underway in India after health officials discovered the country's first cases of the H5N1 strain of the bird flu virus. Thousands of chickens, which died on a farm in Maharashtra state in western India, were found with the infection.

Correspondent Geoff Thompson is in New Delhi.

TONY EASTLEY: Geoff Thompson, just how big is the problem facing Indian authorities?

GEOFF THOMPSON: Well, with 50,000 dead birds reported, and authorities talking about a cull of up to half a million being necessary, it is a big problem.

And it's... we're talking about a remote area, but this is 400 kilometres north of Mumbai, it's about a nine-hour drive from there. Most of India, as we know, is farm land and these poultry farms are spread over many parts of the country.

There's something like half a billion poultry recorded in India in the last census, so it could potentially be a big problem. The positive side is that, having arrived at the site, that only 20,000 have needed to be killed so far, because already they've been dead and buried by the farmers.

TONY EASTLEY: Geoff, has there been much concern, up to this point at least, about bird flu in India, and how well prepared are the authorities?

GEOFF THOMPSON: Well, it certainly hasn't been a running front-page story. It really sprung to life this weekend. What is concerning is that it seems that these birds were dying over the last fortnight, and was only confirmed as being H5N1 on Saturday.

But certainly now, as is often the way in India, the authorities are certainly speaking up the efforts they're making. They're concentrating on 49 farms, 16 of those farms reported deaths.

They've sent 200 vet specialists into the field, and they say they can contain it in four to five days. Whether that turns out to be true, we're just going to have to wait and see.

TONY EASTLEY: Have there been any human infections recorded yet?

GEOFF THOMPSON: Well, there were concerns when one farmer did die in Gujarat, but it's turned out that he died of a bacterial infection, and it was not bird flu.

Something like 80 people are being tested, and seven people are currently under observation with mild fever, and they're keeping a close eye on them.

*TONY EASTLEY: Geoff Thompson in New Delhi.*

[Back to Index](#)

## Bird flu could hobble Africa's AIDS fight

*Monday, February 20, 2006 at 0034 hours IST*

*By ANDREW QUINN*

DAR ES SALAAM, FEB 19 : Bird flu poses a major threat to Africa's fight against its AIDS epidemic, challenging overburdened healthcare systems and stretching economies already hit by the impact of HIV, the UN's AIDS Chief said.

UNAIDS Executive Director Peter Piot said a human outbreak of bird flu in Africa—where the deadly H5N1 strain of the virus was detected in poultry in Nigeria this month—could be a massive blow to the campaign to rein in AIDS.

“We are on very thin ice here,” said Piot in an inspection mission in Dar esSalaam.

“AIDS has made a mess of Africa's health care systems, and none of the factors that created the AIDS disaster have gone away. But with bird flu, we could be looking at things getting worse in a matter of months, not decades.”

Cases of H5N1 have been confirmed on four farms in the northern Nigerian states of Kano and Kaduna and in the central state of Plateau. There have been suspected outbreaks in at five other states in the centre or North.

No human bird flu case has been found in Africa so far. But detecting such a case will be difficult because mortality rates are high from other diseases and health services are almost non-existent in rural areas, where people are often buried without a medical check.

Officials are now increasingly worried the likelihood of human transmission could rise if the virus spreads to other countries in the region—many already suffering from widespread malnutrition, poverty and the effects of the world's worst HIV/AIDS pandemic.

“Africa is fragile, and this could really overburden its systems,” Piot said.

“We have not seen a human outbreak yet. But if we do, the resources are going to have to come from somewhere. That is a real concern for everybody involved in development.”

Piot said scientists were studying the possible interaction of bird flu and HIV, the virus which causes AIDS and which has already infected some 26 million people in sub-Saharan Africa.

While some theories that those whose immune systems are weakened by HIV might die faster in a bird flu outbreak, others say that because bird flu over stimulates the immune response, HIV-positive people might not die themselves but instead become “super carriers” that spread the virus.

— Reuters

[Back to Index](#)

## Avian influenza: significance of mutations in the H5N1 virus

*20 February 2006*

## *CDC, WHO*

Several recent media reports have included speculations about the significance of mutations in H5N1 avian influenza viruses. Some reports have suggested that the likelihood of another pandemic may have increased as a result of changes in the virus.

Since 1997, when the first human infections with the H5N1 avian influenza virus were documented, the virus has undergone a number of changes.

These changes have affected patterns of virus transmission and spread among domestic and wild birds. They have not, however, had any discernible impact on the disease in humans, including its modes of transmission. Human infections remain a rare event. The virus does not spread easily from birds to humans or readily from person to person.

Influenza viruses are inherently unstable. As these viruses lack a genetic proof-reading mechanism, small errors that occur when the virus copies itself go undetected and uncorrected. Specific mutations and evolution in influenza viruses cannot be predicted, making it difficult if not impossible to know if or when a virus such as H5N1 might acquire the properties needed to spread easily and sustainably among humans. This difficulty is increased by the present lack of understanding concerning which specific mutations would lead to increased transmissibility of the virus among humans.

### *Animal viruses*

Virtually all the known subtypes of influenza A viruses circulate in some wild birds, most notably wild waterfowl. In these birds, different viruses constantly mingle with each other and frequently exchange genetic material, resulting in a huge pool of constantly changing viruses. Mutations and reassortment events are commonly observed in the affected bird populations.

In animals, some recent evolutionary changes in the H5N1 virus appear to have made control efforts more difficult and further international spread of the virus in birds more likely. Such changes are fully understandable, particularly in view of the exceptionally large number of birds that have been infected with the H5N1 virus and the frequent interactions between infected free-ranging poultry and wild waterfowl.

Studies have shown that H5N1 viruses from the current outbreaks, when compared with viruses from 1997 and 2003, have become progressively more lethal in experimentally infected chickens and mice, and are also hardier, surviving several days longer in the environment. Other studies have shown that the virus is not yet fully adapted to poultry and is continuing to evolve.

Domestic ducks have acquired an ability to resist the disease caused by some strains, and are now capable of excreting large quantities of highly pathogenic virus without showing the warning signs of illness. In endemic countries, this altered role of domestic ducks is now thought to contribute to perpetuation of the transmission cycle. Research conducted in South-east Asia has recently shown that multiple distinct lineages of H5N1 virus have become established in poultry in different geographical regions, indicating the long-term endemicity of the virus in parts of Asia. That research also detected highly pathogenic H5N1 virus in apparently healthy migratory birds.

In birds, one important recent finding has been the remarkable similarity of viruses from recent outbreaks to those isolated from migratory birds that began dying at the Qinghai Lake nature reserve in central China in late April 2005. Evidence is mounting that this event, which resulted in the deaths of more than 6,000 wild birds, signalled an important change in the way the virus interacts with its natural reservoir host.

Unlike the case with mutations of human viruses (some of which have been transient), it appears that some changes have become fixed in viruses circulating in at least some species of wild birds.

Prior to the Qinghai Lake event, the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus was known to cause occasional sporadic deaths in migratory waterfowl, but not to kill them in large numbers or be carried by them over long distances.

Viruses from Qinghai Lake showed a distinctive mutation at one site experimentally associated with greater lethality in birds and mice. Viruses from the most recent outbreaks, in Nigeria, Iraq, and Turkey, as well as from earlier outbreaks in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia, are virtually identical to Qinghai Lake viruses.

It is considered unusual for an avian influenza virus causing outbreaks in birds to remain this genetically stable over so many months. This finding raises the possibility that the virus – in its highly pathogenic form – has now adapted to at least some species of migratory waterfowl and is co-existing with these birds in evolutionary equilibrium, causing no apparent harm, and travelling with these birds along their migratory routes.

If further research verifies this hypothesis, re-introduction of the virus or spread to new geographical areas can be anticipated when migratory birds begin returning to their breeding areas. The recent appearance of the virus in birds in a rapidly growing number of countries is of public health concern, as it expands opportunities for human exposures and infections to occur. These opportunities increase when the virus spreads from wild to domestic birds, especially when these birds are kept as backyard flocks in close proximity to humans..

To date, no human cases have been linked to exposure to wild birds. Close contact with infected poultry and other domestic birds remains the most important source of human infections.  
Human viruses

Some mutations have been detected in human viruses isolated in 2005 and, most recently, in one virus isolated from a fatal case in the January 2006 outbreak in Turkey. Although these mutations were found at the receptor-binding site and involved the substitution of more mammalian-like amino acids, the effect of these changes on transmissibility of the virus, either from birds to humans or from one person to another, is not fully understood. Moreover, recent studies show that these mutations were transient and did not become fixed in the circulating viruses.

Scientists do not presently know which specific mutations are needed to make the H5N1 virus easily and sustainably transmissible among humans. For example, it is not known whether the absence of a specific receptor in humans for this purely avian virus is responsible for the present lack of efficient human-to-human transmission. For this reason, virological evidence of mutational changes must be assessed together with epidemiological information about transmission patterns actually occurring in human populations. This necessity further underscores the importance of close surveillance and thorough investigation during every outbreak involving human cases.

Assessments of the outbreak in Turkey, conducted by WHO investigative teams, have produced no convincing evidence that mutations have altered the epidemiology of the disease in humans, which was similar to the pattern consistently seen in affected parts of Asia. There is no evidence, at present, from any outbreak site that the virus has increased its ability to spread easily from one person to another.

[Back to Index](#)

## Avian influenza –spread of the virus to new countries

*21 February 2006  
CDC, WHO*

### **Rapid geographical spread of the virus**

The occurrence of the disease in India, reported on 18 February, is part of a recent pattern of rapid geographical spread of the virus in wild and domestic birds. India is one of 13 countries that have

reported their first cases of H5N1 infection in birds since the beginning of February. (The 13 countries, listed in order of reporting, are Iraq, Nigeria, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Iran, Austria, Germany, Egypt, India and France.)

On 20 February, Malaysia reported a fresh outbreak in poultry after having been considered free of the disease for more than a year.

The situation in these recently affected countries varies greatly. Most European countries with good veterinary surveillance have detected the virus in a small number of wild birds only, with no evidence to date of spread to domestic birds.

In Azerbaijan, detection of the virus has coincided with die-offs of domestic birds. In Egypt, outbreaks in domestic poultry have now been confirmed in 10 governorates; deaths have also been reported in exotic zoo birds. In Iraq, presence of the virus in birds was found only after the country confirmed its first human case.

In Nigeria, as in India, the first cases were detected in large commercial farms, where the disease is highly visible and outbreaks are difficult to miss.

Apart from Iraq, none of the countries newly affected during February has reported human cases. Iraq has reported two human cases, both of which were fatal; samples from several other patients are currently undergoing tests.

For human health, experience elsewhere over the past two years has shown that the greatest risk of cases arises when the virus becomes established in small backyard flocks, which allow continuing opportunities for close human contact, exposures, and infections to occur.

All available evidence indicates that the virus does not spread easily from poultry to humans. To date, very few cases have been detected in poultry workers, cullers, or veterinarians. Almost all cases have been linked to close contact to diseased household flocks, often during slaughtering, defeathering, butchering, and preparation of poultry for consumption.

No cases have been linked to the consumption of properly cooked poultry meat or eggs, even in households where disease was known to be present in flocks.

[Back to Index](#)

## **Bird Flu Found in India, Malaysia Prompts Import Bans (Update4)**

*2006-02-21 03:31 (New York)*

*By Mrinalini Datta and Chitra Somayaji*

Feb. 21 (Bloomberg) -- Singapore, China and at least four other Asian countries imposed bans on some chicken imports after bird flu was found in India and Malaysia. Poultry prices plunged in India because of concern over the lethal H5N1 virus. Shares of Leong Hup Holdings Bhd., Malaysia's biggest chicken supplier, dropped as much as 25 percent, leading other poultry stocks lower, after Singapore suspended imports of poultry and eggs from the Malaysian state of Selangor.

Chicken prices fell 42 percent Feb. 19 at the Ghazipur poultry market in New Delhi, India's biggest, the day after an outbreak was discovered in poultry in the western state of Maharashtra, said Shashi Kapur, president of the Poultry Federation of India. Jet Airways Ltd., the country's largest domestic carrier, took the meat off menus.

``Demand for poultry will definitely be affected in the short term as people will be concerned," Kapur, who owns the Kegg Farms Group in Gurgaon, a New Delhi suburb, said yesterday in an interview. ``It's a knee-jerk scare."

The virus in birds creates more opportunity for human infection and increases the risk of it changing into a pandemic form. At least 92 of the 170 people known to have been infected with the H5N1 avian influenza virus have died, mainly in Asia, according to the World Health Organization.

### **Malaysian Shares**

Shares of Kuala Lumpur-based Leong Hup fell 11 sen, or 4.1 percent, to 2.55 ringgit, after tumbling 24 percent yesterday. Farm's Best Bhd., a Malaysian animal-feed miller and poultry-product seller, fell 4.1 percent to 4.94 ringgit.

As many as 40 free-range chickens were found dead last week on the outskirts of the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, state news agency Bernama reported yesterday, citing Malaysia's Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

European Union leaders yesterday sought to reassure consumers about the safety of poultry meat as concern about avian influenza causes chicken, duck and turkey sales to drop in the region.

Austria, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Nigeria and Slovenia are among countries to have reported initial outbreaks in either wild birds or domestic fowl in the past month.

### **Indonesia Deaths**

Indonesia's eight fatalities this year give it the highest death tally in 2006. Five Indonesians, including an eight-month-old boy, are being treated for suspected avian flu in Hasan Sadikin Hospital in the West Java city of Bandung, Adang Rasmita, a hospital official said today.

Most of the people who have contracted the virus handled infected poultry or came in contact with their excrement. Cooking meat and eggs properly kills the virus, according to WHO.

It's important not to blow the risk of human infection from avian flu "out of context," said Tony Davis, chief executive officer of Tiger Airways Pte, a budget carrier partly owned by Singapore Airlines Ltd.

"Governments are taking the threat very seriously," Davis said. "It's one of the multitudes of unknown factors that we have to deal with, whether it is the volatility of the fuel prices or potential diseases."

Air travel hasn't been disrupted in France, India or Austria, which have reported outbreaks in the past week, Davis said. China, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan also announced bans yesterday on poultry and poultry products from countries where avian flu has been reported, including India and France.

The outbreak is hurting India's market for chicken and chicken products, worth an estimated 350 billion rupees (\$7.9 billion). Culling of chicken in 49 farms in Maharashtra's Nandurbar district began Feb. 19. Mass slaughtering may cost the industry as much as 100 million rupees, the Poultry Federation's Kapur estimated.

*Editor: Tighe (jwg)*

[Back to Index](#)

[Avian influenza - situation in Nigeria - update](#)

*22 February 2006*

The outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza in poultry, confirmed at a commercial farm in Kaduna State on 8 February, has now spread to commercial farms in several other contiguous states. No human cases have been detected to date.

Nigerian officials have confirmed outbreaks at commercial farms in the states of Kano, Plateau, Katsina, and Bauchi, and in the Abuja area. Outbreaks have also been detected at more farms in Kaduna. Outbreaks in additional states are currently under investigation.

To date, four patients with respiratory symptoms and a history of exposure to diseased poultry have been investigated for possible infection. This number includes a woman who died of an acute respiratory illness on 16 February. The three remaining patients are all in good condition. Arrangements are being made to send samples from all four patients for testing at a WHO collaborating laboratory in the United Kingdom.

The initial outbreak in Kaduna state is now known to have begun on 10 January, raising the possibility that earlier human exposures and cases may have occurred in that area and elsewhere. At hospitals in Kaduna, Kano, and Katsina near affected farms, staff from the WHO-led teams have now examined hundreds of patient records, searching for possible cases that may have occurred earlier. No such cases have been identified to date.

The scale of the outbreak in birds is not yet fully understood. Most investigations have followed poultry deaths on large commercial farms, where outbreaks are highly visible. Little is known about the presence of the virus in small backyard flocks, where the greatest risk of human exposures and infections resides.

Nigeria has an estimated poultry population of around 140 million birds, largely concentrated in the south-western part of the country. As is the case in several affected parts of South-east Asia, around 60% of Nigeria's poultry production takes place in small backyard flocks. Large-scale commercial farming of poultry occurs mainly in the northern states, where outbreaks have been confirmed. Rapid spread of the virus within Nigeria has raised concern over possible spread to neighbouring countries. Borders are porous and restrictions on the movement of people and poultry are difficult to enforce. WHO staff at offices in these countries are monitoring the situation closely in collaboration with government officials. Rumours of possible human cases in neighbouring countries are also being closely monitored.

[Back to Index](#)

## Bird flu most likely in Australia, scientists say

*23 Feb 2006 06:27:11 GMT*

*By Michael Perry*

SYDNEY, Feb 23 (Reuters) - Birds from neighbouring Indonesia have most likely brought avian flu to Australia's sparsely populated northern shores, but it is yet to be detected, two of the nation's top scientists said on Thursday.

"There is no magic curtain between Indonesia and Australia, and given the expanse of our land it would not be surprising if it was here," said Professor Mark von Itzstein from Griffith University in the state of Queensland.

"In my view it is highly likely," von Itzstein, who led the Australian team that developed the flu drug Relenza, told Reuters.

Another top bird flu expert, Macquarie University's Professor Peter Curson, agreed avian flu had probably reached Australia.

"There's certainly no doubt that parts of northern Australia, and perhaps slightly further afield, are on the normal flight path of migrating birds from parts of Asia and Southeast Asia, so I think it's a reasonable assumption," Curson said.

Australia and Indonesia are separated by the Timor Sea, which at the closest point would take only a day boat ride to cross.

In Indonesia, 19 people have died from avian flu. The Indonesian health ministry on Wednesday said tests showed a 27-year-old woman in the capital Jakarta had died of bird flu. The WHO is yet to confirm the death is due to avian flu.

The highly contagious H5N1 avian flu has killed more than 90 people in seven countries in Asia and the Middle East since 2003 and two hundred million birds have died of the virus or been culled.

Alarm is growing at the sudden resurgence of the H5N1 virus as it spreads rapidly across Europe, into Africa and now India, where hundreds of millions of people live in rural areas side-by-side with livestock and domestic fowl.

Human victims contract the virus through direct contact with infected birds, but experts fear it is just a matter of time before the virus mutates and spreads easily among people, triggering a pandemic.

Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service said testing of wild birds in northern Australia had not detected avian flu.

"These species are waders and shore birds, so fortunately they're highly unlikely to come into contact with domestic poultry, and that's the serious risk for Australia," said spokesman Carson Creagh.

"We do conduct surveys every spring-time when migratory birds arrive and samples are sent off to the national reference libraries for testing. So far we're free of the disease and we're certainly hoping that we remain that way."

Von Itzstein said his comments should not panic Australians as the vast majority of the country's 20 million people live in the far south of Australia, where few migratory birds reach.

But he said if migratory birds could spread avian flu across Asia to Europe and Africa, then it was only logical that infected birds would have reached Australia.

"It is quite a small stretch of ocean compared with the flights migratory birds do to northern Europe. We have to realise that we are not isolated," he said.

"It is clearly on the march in Europe, it is mobile, so there is no reason it is not going to be mobile towards us. It is highly likely that somewhere on the northern parts of the country, on the vast coastline, there are birds that have flu."

However, von Itzstein said the arrival of infected birds did not necessarily mean the disease would spread in Australia.

"They could die, they could disappear, fly back," he said.

*Source: Reuters*

[Back to Index](#)

## Two more bird flu suspects hospitalised

*February 23, 2006*

*By: A Mid Day Correspondent*

Two more bird flu suspects have been kept under observation at the 26-bed isolation ward at the government hospital in Navapur.

The results of the tests conducted on the suspected victims will be announced today in Delhi.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Dr A Ramadoss said, “Of the 96 suspected victims tested, 90 have turned out to be negative. The result for the remaining six will be out by today evening.”

But media reports allege that traces of the H5N1 antibodies have been found in two of the 96 samples sent to the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune.

However, Dr PP Doke, director, health services, Maharashtra, said, “I have heard about it in the media but we have no clue about it,” he said.

No halt at Navapur

Since yesterday, passenger trains are not halting at Navapur station. The district collector of Nandurbar issued an emergency notice, instructing trains to not halt at Nandurbar.

The only exception will be the express trains, as the tickets have been booked months ago. The trains that won't halt at Navapur are the Surat-Bhusawal passenger train and the Surat-Nandurbar passenger train.

“From this morning, we are also stopping ticket reservations to Navapur and its adjoining areas,” said Pranay Prabhakar, PRO, Western Railway.

[Back to Index](#)