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Bulgaria bans Romanian poultry over bird flu

26 May 2006



More SOFIA, May 25 (Reuters) - Bulgaria said it would ban poultry products from its northern Black Sea neighbour Romania on Thursday after the discovery of dozens of new cases of avian flu there.

Romanian officials have culled domestic birds and temporarily quarantined populated areas, including part of the capital Bucharest, after detecting over 40 cases of the potentially lethal H5N1 virus in birds this month.

"We are looking at the situation in Romania with concern," Bulgarian Agriculture Minister Nihat Kabil told journalists.

"I am preparing a ban for the import of live birds, eggs and poultry meat produced in Romania. It will be signed by the end of the day."

Earlier this year, Bulgaria detected four cases of bird flu -- far fewer than Romania or its southern neighbour Turkey -- in wild swans suspected of carrying the disease from northern Russia as they migrated south for winter.

Experts feared more outbreaks would occur as flocks returned north this spring, but so far, Kabil said Bulgaria had registered no new cases.

But he said authorities would step up checks, boosting border controls with Romania and urging people to keep domestic birds indoors.

"We have to live next to this virus that is highly pathogenic. But what is more worrying is that it may possibly be transferred from human to human," he said.

Neither Romania nor Bulgaria has detected any human cases of the flu, which has killed more than 120 people and tens of millions of birds, mostly in Asia, since 2003.



It is not easily passed between humans, but virologists fear it could mutate into an easily transmissible form and spark a global pandemic.

Source: Reuters

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Bird flu outbreak registered in eight villages in Siberia-1

26/ 05/ 2006



MOSCOW, May 26 (RIA Novosti) - New cases of bird flu have been registered in eight villages in three Siberian regions, the agriculture ministry said Friday.

"Fowl infected with avian influenza have been registered in three villages in Novosibirsk Region, four villages in Omsk Region, and one village in Altai Territory," the ministry said in a statement.

None of the infected birds had been vaccinated against the disease, the ministry said.

The Emergency Situations Ministry said last month that around 1.1 million birds had died of the disease in Russia, and that 300,000 had been culled in measures to control the spread of the virus since the beginning of February.

No human cases of bird flu have yet been diagnosed in Russia.

Source: RIA NOVOSTI

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Human-to-human infection of bird flu taking place in Indonesia, expert

2006-05-26

JAKARTA, May 26 (Xinhua) -- Indonesian bird flu researcher CA Nidom MS said he was convinced that human-to-human bird flu infection had been taking place in Indonesia, official news agency Antara reported on Friday.

"I am convinced human-to-human infection has been taking place because studies have found the development of H3N2 and H1N1 strains of bird flu virus which originated from H5N1 virus. Much more, fowl-to-human infection cannot yet be proven since the death of Iwan in Tangerang," he said on the sidelines of a seminar on bird flu in Surabaya, East Java, on Friday.

Nidom, a researcher of the Tropical Disease Centre (TDC) of the University of Airlangga (Unair)'s Medical School, made the remarks in response to a statement by a World Health Organization official that bird flu infection from human to human had been found in the village of Kubu Sembelang, Tanah Karo district, North Sumatra, Indonesia.

According to Nidom, who is also a lecturer at the Unair's Medical School, the WHO official's statement was logical because the avian influenza was just like a common flu so that there was no need to be panicked.

"I have disclosed this conclusion in Pontianak last April," he added.

Seven of the nine dead victims were cluster victims who suffered from the same symptoms, WHO spokesman Peter Cordingley said in Manila on Thursday.

But the WHO conclusion was denied by Health Minister Siti Fadila Supari.



"The cluster bird flu case in Tana Karo cannot yet be said a human-to-human bird flu case because proof on the mutation of virus DNA which is identical with the H5N1 strain of virus that infected the nine victims has not yet been found. And there is no proof of epidemiological human-to-human infection," the minister said.

As the disease expands all over the world, experts fear that the virus can mutate into a certain form that easily transmits from human to human, which will kill millions of people.

Some 27 out of 33 provinces in Indonesia have been contracted with bird flu, while human fatality stands at 32 and infections at 43, according to the WHO.

All over the world, the WHO has raised the confirmed human death toll from the H5N1 bird flu strain to 122, while the total number of confirmed human infections since the current outbreak began in 2003 has reached 216.

Editor: Liu Dan, www.chinaview.cn

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Two more Indonesians die of bird flu

May 27, 2006

Jakarta (dpa) - Local tests show that two siblings who died earlier this week in the Indonesian province of West Java were infected by the bird flu virus, officials said Friday.

Health Minister Siti Fadilah Supari said the two, an 18-year-old boy and his 10-year-old sister, died within hours of each other on Tuesday in the Hasan Sadikin Hospital in the West Java capital of Bandung, the state-run news agency Antara reported.

If confirmed by the UN World Health Organisation, the two deaths would bring the death toll from bird flu to 35 in Indonesia.

Achmad, an official with the ministry's bird flu special task force, said the two were admitted to the hospital less than one day before they died, and blood samples from the two have been sent to the WHO-affiliated laboratory in Hong Kong for further tests.

In another case, the WHO earlier this week said a cluster of seven human bird-flu cases in Indonesia may have been caused by multiple person-to-person transmissions and was the largest cluster reported so far.

The apparent infection chain among an extended family in North Sumatra began with a woman who was believed to have passed on the H5N1 virus to relatives who were with her "in a small room" when she was sick and coughing, according to the WHO in Geneva.

The woman's 10-year-old nephew subsequently got bird flu and is considered a possible source of infection for her brother, who was "closely involved in caring for his son," the WHO said. The three people are among six family members who have died since May 4.

Limited human-to-human bird flu transmission among family members or those in close contact has been reported in other cases and the WHO said it "cannot be ruled out" in the most recent cluster case.

But the WHO still said there is no evidence of "efficient human-to-human transmission" in the most recent cases in Indonesia, a reference to the fact that the infections appear to have happened at close quarters.

The disease's spread has raised fears that the virus could eventually mutate to spread easily among humans, threatening a pandemic with millions of infections.



Indonesia's health ministry and WHO said they are concerned about the most recent cluster case in North Sumatra, and health experts are searching for any cases among other relatives or the wider community.

Health officials have reportedly asked dozens of people living in the Karo district area of the province, where the largest cluster case was found, to quarantine themselves while experts continue to investigate.

Indonesia is second only to Vietnam in human cases and deaths in the current outbreak of bird flu. Worldwide, 218 people in 10 countries have been confirmed with bird flu, of which 124 have died, according to the WHO.

Source: Bangkok Post

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Romania reports more than 88 bird flu outbreaks

May 28, 2006

The number of outbreaks among birds of avian flu in Romania has reached 88, with a further 23 suspected outbreak locations, as of noon Sunday, the Romanian news agency Rompres said.

A month after the strain was said to have been eradicated in the Black Sea state, most of the current cases have been reported in the central region of Transylvania.

The latest outbreaks originated from a poultry farm in the county of Brasov, some 170 km north of Bucharest,

Last Friday, the Agriculture Ministry confirmed in a statement that the bird flu virus had been found "in 75 localities from 13 counties."

"There are also 35 suspect locations. The national institute for animal health is further testing suspect deaths in fowl," the statement said.

Reports here said three districts in the capital Bucharest are among those affected and among the 13 counties, Brasov was at the top with 28 outbreaks.

Over the past 12 days alone, authorities have culled 500,000 birds to prevent the spread of the virus, which a World Health Organisation expert says "has broken out very rapidly."

The Romanians have culled one million fowl and dealt with 60 outbreaks of bird flu since the first case was detected in the Danube delta last year, officials say.

To date the country has not reported any cases of bird flu in people.

Source: Xinhua

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First vaccine to fight bird flu is here

Monday, May 29, 2006

NEW DELHI: A single vaccine can now protect poultry against two of the deadliest killers - bird flu and Newcastle disease.

A team of American biologists have found that inserting a bird flu gene into a popular vaccine that protects poultry against Newcastle disease, leads to resistance against both these viruses within the bird's body. There currently is no vaccine for avian flu.



Developed by Peter Palese, chair, department of microbiology, Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City, this new vaccine could, for the first time, offer an alternative to the mass slaughtering that has cost the world's poultry industry millions in lost sales, and also an effective and inexpensive way to vaccinate poultry against bird flu.

Scientists added the gene H5 - one of 16 subtypes of hemagglutinin, a protein that binds the avian influenza virus to the cells it infects, to a commercially available Newcastle vaccine.

When they exposed chicken to lethal doses of the avian influenza virus and the Newcastle virus, birds inoculated with the recombinant vaccine produced antibodies against both viruses, offering protection against both diseases.

The researchers are now negotiating with drug companies about mass production of the vaccine. They say the Newcastle disease virus vaccine that is now in use, costs less than a penny per bird, and the genetically-engineered version to protect against avian flu should not cost much more.

Kounteya Sinha, Times Internet Limited

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Indonesian villagers blame magic, not flu

Monday, May 29, 2006

KUBU SIMBELANG, Indonesia -- The three brick-and-clapboard houses stand along the village's muddy dirt road, empty and forlorn. A naked light bulb hangs from a wire over one door, still burning. A white pet bird cries for food from its cage. But no one dares to go near.

Health experts have focused on the houses since an extended family started dying from bird flu and no links to sick birds could be established. They suspect limited human-to-human transmission, but say there is no need to panic because no one else in this mountain farming village has fallen ill and the virus has not mutated.

Some neighbors insist, however, that bird flu is not to blame. They are convinced black magic is at work, that ghosts now haunt their quiet Christian community of about 1,500 people.

Many are too scared to even pass by the family's houses, and some who live nearby are awakened by nightmares that they will be the next to die.

"We are so afraid just to step into that house," said a 37-year-old woman who identified herself only as Sembining. "We can't tell what we're afraid of - we're just afraid."

She lived near the victims and said the first woman who died was like a daughter to her. She recalled feeding and caring for her friend as she lay burning with fever before bird flu was ever suspected. Sembining can't understand why she, too, didn't fall ill.

"I think the family was cursed," she said. "It must be, because if it's bird flu, why only their family? Their blood?"

This is the largest cluster in a handful of cases involving bird flu passing from human to human, but scientists think it has always done so between blood relatives - not spouses. That has led some to theorize there may be a genetic susceptibility to the disease, but there is no evidence yet to support that.

Tests found no trace of the H5N1 virus in the village's poultry, and dozens of hens, roosters and chicks run freely in backyards. Pigs, cows, buffalo, dogs and barefoot children roam along the rutted road and across fields of chilies, oranges and limes.



Whatever the source of the infection, six of seven family members who tested positive for H5N1 have died. An eighth was buried before samples could be taken, but the World Health Organization considers her part of the cluster.

As their neighbors started dying, confusion and mistrust prompted villagers to stop cooperating with officials. Many refused to give blood samples, fearing they would later fall ill and suffer the fate of their neighbors.

The case has been a powerful lesson for WHO officials in understanding the importance of early communication and education.

By MARGIE MASON, AP MEDICAL WRITER

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Wild Animal Trade Plays Role in Bird Flu Spread, Scientists Say

May 31, 2006



The legal and illegal trade of wild birds is playing a role in spreading the H5N1 avian flu virus that's killed 127 people, scientists said.

"We still don't understand this movement of wildlife," William Karesh, the New York-based director of the field veterinary program at the Wildlife Conservation Society said today at a conference in Rome. "We have good records for legal trade, but

that's only a bit of what's going on and it's probably not where the problems are."

About 350 million live animals are moved worldwide to become pets or serve other domestic purposes in a trade worth about \$20 billion a year. About one-quarter of this trade is thought to be illegal and so isn't inspected or tested. Disease outbreaks resulting from wildlife trade have caused hundreds of billions of dollars of economic damage globally, Karesh said.

Scientists from more than 100 countries are meeting in Rome to try to shift the focus of bird flu prevention back to the animals that incubate the disease. The H5N1 virus has killed almost two of every three people infected this year, leading governments to buy antivirals, including Roche Holding AG's Tamiflu, and to sponsor vaccine development. Focusing on controlling the disease in animal populations would be better, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization says.

"We have to focus on this issue of trade because it's the most frequent way of spreading disease from one region to another," said Joseph Domenech, chief veterinary officer at the Rome-based FAO. "We're talking about illegal trade here as well, which is much more difficult to regulate. This includes legal and illegal trade in wild birds which is quite significant and often ignored."

Exotic Birds

Health officials are worried the H5N1 virus may change into a form easily spread among people, touching off a pandemic similar to the one that began in 1918 in which as many as 50 million people died. Since 2003, H5N1 is known to have infected 224 people in 10 countries, killing 127 of them, according to the World Health Organization in Geneva.

Wild fowl in the pet or exotic bird trade may carry parasites, bacteria and viruses that don't cause disease in the host animal and become dangerous when introduced to new geographic areas or to new host species. Dangerous strains of both the avian flu virus and Newcastle's disease, another ailment that can affect birds, have been found in internationally traded non-domestic birds.



Decreasing contact among different species, including that between humans and birds, may be a better way of tackling the disease than trying to eliminate the virus or the wild species that may harbor them, Karesh said.

More Monitoring Needed

“Focusing efforts at markets to regulate, reduce, or, in some cases, eliminate the trade in wildlife could provide a cost-effective approach to decrease the risks in disease for humans, domestic animals and wildlife,” he said.

In addition to monitoring trade, more work needs to be done to study the presence of the H5N1 virus in wild birds, scientists at the conference said.

The FAO and partners including not-for-profit Wetlands International, based in Wageningen, Netherlands, and the Paris-based French Agricultural Research Center for International Development started an 18-month study of the disease in wild birds in January. They haven't yet been able to find an instance of the virus in wild birds collected in Africa and parts of Europe, said Nicholas Gaidet, a researcher at the French center.

- Bloomberg News

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