

Bird Flu News 27-28 Feb 2006

NZ AT MOST BIRD FLU RISK FROM TRAVELLERS , WHO SAYS	1
NIGER FINDS BIRD FLU AS SPREAD OF VIRUS ACCELERATES WORLDWIDE	2
FARMERS SURPRISED BY FLU COMMENTS	2
BIRD FLU IS HERE	4
VETERINARIANS HELD OVER IBARAKI BIRD FLU COVERAGE	6
SWEDEN FINDS FIRST BIRD FLU CASES IN DUCKS IN SOUTH OF COUNTRY	6
PAKISTAN CULLS POULTRY , TESTS FOWL FOR POSSIBLE BIRD FLU VIRUS	7

NZ at most bird flu risk from travellers, WHO says

27 Feb 2006 05:18:19 GMT

WELLINGTON, Feb 27 (Reuters) - Overseas travellers would be the most likely cause of an outbreak of the deadly H5N1 bird flu in New Zealand, a senior World Health Organisation (WHO) official said on Monday.

Shigeru Omi, WHO's Western Pacific regional director, said he doubted any human pandemic of the disease would begin in New Zealand and that its arrival in the South Pacific country from migratory birds was "not so likely".

"It is very unlikely the human pandemic will start in New Zealand," Omi told reporters at a news conference in Wellington. "If it occurs in some country in Asia then it is possible the virus will be carried by travellers to New Zealand."

"I don't think I can say nil," he added when asked of the chances of the disease being brought to New Zealand by birds. "But it's not so likely".

Bird flu remains essentially an animal disease but has killed at least 92 people since 2003, spreading from Asia to the Middle East and reaching Europe this year with wild bird migrations.

Experts fear it is only a matter of time before it mutates into a form that can be easily passed between humans, sparking a pandemic in which millions could die.

Omi said the key to halting any pandemic would be early detection, which New Zealand seemed well equipped to do.

"There is a two to three week window of opportunities and that is when a very aggressive plan has to take place with provision of anti-viral drugs and restriction of movement," he said. "Then you may be able to prevent the further spread."

"Given the infrastructure, size of the country and level of commitment over the country then, if New Zealand cannot contain it, then I do not think many other countries will be able to."

New Zealand's Health Minister Pete Hodgson said the country's public health system was focusing on human detection as part of its normal scrutiny of people showing influenza symptoms in the run up to the winter months.

"As far as the surveillance with avian influenza, there does not need to be an army of people looking at dead ducks," said Hodgson.

"The chance of it occurring in migratory birds in New Zealand is slim. (So) our surveillance is around human cases and through normal influenza monitoring," he said

Source: Reuters

[Back to Index](#)

Niger Finds Bird Flu as Spread of Virus Accelerates Worldwide

2006-02-27 10:02 (New York)

Feb. 27 (Bloomberg) -- Bird flu was found in Niger, the 16th country to confirm an initial outbreak this month, doubling the number of nations reporting infections as scientists warn the virus is becoming more lethal to animals.

Avian influenza was confirmed today as the killer of domestic ducks in the southern Niger town of Magaria, said Maria Zampaglione, a spokeswoman for World Organization for Animal Health. It was also isolated in birds from Dan Barde, she said. Officials are testing possible outbreaks in Kenya and Pakistan.

"We're struggling to try to make sense of it all," said John Oxford, professor of virology at Queen Mary's School of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of London, in a telephone interview. "It does look like" it's gaining momentum, "which is not a good sign."

Variants of the H5N1 virus have become progressively more lethal over the past eight years in experimentally infected chickens and mice, the World Health Organization said last week. They are also hardier, surviving several days longer in the environment. The disease in birds increases the risk of human infection and creates more opportunity for the virus to mutate into a pandemic form capable of killing millions of people.

At least 92 of the 170 people known to have been infected with the H5N1 strain of bird flu since late 2003 have died, mainly in Asia, according to the WHO. People most at risk of infection are those who come into contact with poultry during slaughtering, plucking feathers or butchering.

At least 15 other countries on three continents have reported initial outbreaks of the virus this month: Iraq, Iran, Bulgaria, Nigeria, Greece, Azerbaijan, Italy, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Egypt, India, France, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

By Jason Gale

[Back to Index](#)

Farmers surprised by flu comments

Tuesday, 28 February 2006, 15:38 GMT

Professor Sir David King, the government's chief scientific adviser, told the BBC it may become "endemic" and remain for "five years plus".

He also ruled out using the existing vaccine against the H5N1 strain.

The National Farmers' Union said it "simply did not accept" his view that the virus would become prevalent.



"If someone is saying we are going to see this endemically within the UK commercial flock that is a surprise," the NFU's chief poultry adviser said.

The NFU was following scientific and veterinary advice on the question of vaccination, chief poultry adviser Maria Ball said.

But the Soil Association said it was "mystified" and "dismayed" by the decision not to vaccinate.

It called for the use of "ring" vaccination - when poultry close to any outbreak are inoculated.

"They have got to bring in every weapon in their armoury," said the association's Robin Maynard.

He said he had a sense of "deja vu", likening it to the 2001 outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

"The end result was 11 million animals slaughtered and £8bn cost to the tax-payer.

"We just don't want to go down that barbaric, medieval route."

Vaccine

But mass vaccination of British poultry in the event of a bird flu outbreak had not been ruled out, Environment Secretary Margaret Beckett said on Monday.

However, Mrs Beckett has questioned the vaccine's effectiveness in preventing the H5N1 virus spreading.

The government is understood to be holding talks with Chinese scientists who are developing a new vaccine, which it is hoped will be more effective.

Prof King said the existing H5N1 inoculation would mask signs of the virus in birds but not prevent its spread.

Rare breeds of birds kept in zoos would be the only cases where vaccines would be feasible. The inoculation of organic or free range birds would not be recommended.

The vaccination of nearly a million free range ducks and geese has begun in south-west France.

In the UK, people with 50 or more poultry must register with the government before midnight on Tuesday.

Foot-and-mouth

Prof King told BBC News: "I would anticipate that avian flu will arrive at some point in the UK.

"We also have to anticipate that it will be here for five years plus. We are talking about the possibility of this disease being endemic here in the UK."

BBC environment correspondent Sarah Mukherjee said Prof King's comments seemed to "fly against the spirit of what we have heard from all sorts of government scientists and ministers".

But she said he may be envisaging sporadic outbreaks that would be prevented from spreading beyond small areas.

Free-range poultry farmer John Widdowson, from Tiverton, Devon, said Prof King's comments were "no surprise at all".

"But I still think we have got a good chance of keeping it out of poultry flocks. We have had lots of time to prepare for this," he said.

"This doesn't need to be a catastrophe."

But organic poultry farmer Ritichie Riggs, from Holsworthy, Devon, branded Prof King's comments as "irresponsible", while the decision not to vaccinate had left him "demoralised".

"They don't care about the flocks, they are not farming people, they don't care about the animals," he said.

"We are just going along exactly the same route as they took with foot -and-mouth disease," he said.
www.bbc.co.uk

[Back to Index](#)

Bird flu is here

Tuesday, February 28, 2006

By Iqbal Khattak

PESHAWAR: Pakistan is awaiting confirmation of the presence of the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of the bird flu virus after chickens at two farms in the NWFP tested positive for the H5 - type strain, officials said on Monday.

"We are not classifying it - low pathogenic avian influenza - as bird flu. It is not the N-type virus," Dr Muhammad Afzal of the Ministry of Food and Livestock told Daily Times.

He said the ministry had sent the samples to the World Reference Laboratory in Weybridge, London, to determine if it is the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain.

The H5N1 strain has killed at least 92 people since late 2003 and the virus has spread rapidly in the past month with cases in wild birds and poultry confirmed across parts of Europe, Africa as well as India and Malaysia. Dr Afzal said all birds in the two farms, a breeder farm and a layer farm, in Charsadda and Abbottabad districts would be destroyed. About 700 birds on both farms had died after developing breathing problems, he said.

The process of slaughtering 16,000 hens and 11,000 eggs on the Abbottabad poultry farm began on Monday, Online reported. The Livestock Department said that polyphonic bags filled with carbondioxide gas will be used to kill the birds, a department official said. They will then be buried in an eight-foot hole, which will first be sprayed with chemicals to protect the virus from spreading.

Meanwhile, the local community and the poultry association were unhappy that the government was destroying the livestock prior to establishing the presence of the bird flu virus in them. They forced the livestock team to stop its work for a while, but relented when security forces were called in.

Local politician and poultry farmer Haji Ghulam Mustafa Jadoon threatened to sue the government unless it stopped the birds' slaughter. He said that the government should have sealed the poultry farm until concrete proof of virus was established.

The two farms were sealed off and police surrounded them to stop the movement of birds and workers from the farms. No broiler farm has been found to be affected. "Our initial findings suggested that the outbreak is not from any migratory birds and it is not harmful for humans," Afzal said.



But it is believed that potentially deadly H5 and H7 strains of bird flu viruses start off in low - pathogenic forms when they are first introduced to poultry flocks and mutate to a highly pathogenic form within a few months if they are allowed to circulate.

Fazle Malick, owner of the Gul Poultry Farm in Charsadda where chickens tested positive for the H -5 type virus, told Daily Times that 2000 chickens had died on his farm but he did not believe they died of bird flu.

The sale of chickens dropped by 60 percent with the news, Niaz Gul, president of the NWFP Poultry Association, told Daily Times.

“I used to sell more than 400 chickens a day, but today I have sold a little over 200,” chicken retailer Sher Bahadar in Nauthia bazaar said.

Dr Saadullah Jan of the NWFP Veterinary Research Institute in Peshawar, said the broad H5 virus category “only kills birds, unlike the highly pathogenic H5N1 sub-type of the virus”.

The confirmation of the presence of the H5N1 strain in Pakistan would have serious consequences for the 25,000 poultry farms in the country. Chicken accounts for up to 45 percent of meat consumption in the 150 million population of Pakistan.

The detection of H5-type bird flu prompted the authorities to gather samples from all poultry farms in the area for tests, a statement from the Ministry of Food and Livestock said.

The Food Ministry statement said that all commercial poultry farms in the area are being sampled and their status will be notified accordingly. “We have since requested concerned health authorities for medical check up of the farm workers. They are taking the necessary steps in this regard,” it read.

“We also request all the poultry farmers that they should increase the level of bio -security at their farms and immediately report any abnormal or high mortality to local veterinarians or the district livestock/poultry development officer for immediate diagnosis.”

The ministry said the government had prepared an emergency preparedness plan that includes standard operating procedures for surveillance, diagnosis and control of avian influenza. It said that the government was fulfilling its international obligation and reporting the cases to the Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Animal Health Organisation.

“We may like to emphasise that cooked poultry and poultry are safe to eat and there should not be any undue concern in this regard,” it said.

The ministry is also setting up a special information node that will be open from 0800 to 2200 hours daily including Sundays and holidays.

www.dailytimes.com.pk

[Back to Index](#)

Veterinarians held over Ibaraki bird flu coverup

Feb. 28, 2006

MITO, Ibaraki Pref. (Kyodo) Police arrested four people Monday related to a poultry farm operator in Ibaraki Prefecture in connection with a suspected coverup of an avian flu outbreak last year.

Police suspect Ikuo Eguchi, 58, Yoshio Maeda, 53, Takanori Nakamura, 36, all veterinarians at IKN Egg Farms Co., and IKN employee Tomohiro Nakane, 32, violated the Domestic Animal Infectious Diseases Control Law, which requires reporting any suspected contagious diseases in poultry.

They also suspect an antibody test conducted at the National Institute of Animal Health in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture, by a veterinarian at the request of the IKN vets showed positive, the sources said.

The Tsukuba veterinarian is an acquaintance of the IKN vets.

The four IKN employees allegedly failed to report a case of suspected avian flu infection to the Ibaraki government late last August.

Police searched IKN Egg Farms and the Tsukuba research institute in December and questioned the vets.

The vets at IKN Egg Farm are also suspected of obstructing an avian flu test at three farms conducted by Ibaraki Prefecture last August by submitting samples taken from other poultry farms, the sources said.

The prefecture has alleged that IKN Egg Farms committed similar misdeeds at two other poultry farms it operates in Ibaraki, prefectural officials said.

Avian flu infections have been found at 40 farms in Ibaraki Prefecture since June, and about 5.8 million chickens have had to be killed.

The Japan Times

[Back to Index](#)

Sweden Finds First Bird Flu Cases in Ducks in South of Country

2006-02-28 06:44 (New York)

By Chantal Britt

Feb. 28 (Bloomberg) -- Sweden identified its first cases of avian influenza in two wild ducks and tests are being conducted to determine whether it's the H5N1 strain that can kill humans.

Sweden confirmed an aggressive form of the bird flu virus in two tufted ducks found dead close to a nuclear power station in Oskarshamn, in the south, the government said in a release on its Web site. Preliminary tests have confirmed that it's probably the same virus that has struck Russia and China.

Lethal bird flu reached the European Union this month with cases in Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland, Romania and Slovenia. The spread of the disease in birds raises the risk of human infection. Over half the people known to have H5N1 since late 2003 have died.

The Swedish government decided to expand protective measures in the area and is examining the spread of the disease, it said in the release. The EU's reference laboratory in the U.K. is conducting tests to confirm the subtype of the virus.

--With reporting by Jonas Bergman in Stockholm. Editor: Fourcade.

[Back to Index](#)

Pakistan Culls Poultry, Tests Fowl for Possible Bird Flu Virus

2006-02-28 04:16 (New York)

By Khalid Qayum

Feb. 28 (Bloomberg) -- Veterinary officials in Pakistan are culling poultry they suspect may be infected with the lethal bird flu virus that has ravaged flocks in neighboring India.

About 10,000 chickens were slaughtered on a farm in Charsadda yesterday and today, M. Afzal, a spokesman for Pakistan's Health Ministry, said today in a telephone interview from the capital, Islamabad. Afzal said he expected 16,000 fowl on a farm in Abbotabad in the country's North West Frontier province to be culled today.

A government laboratory is testing samples for the H5N1 avian influenza strain. Samples are also being sent to a laboratory in the U.K. after the poultry at the two farms were found infected with the H5 subtype of the bird flu virus, a statement by the health ministry said yesterday.

Niger, in West Africa, yesterday became the 16th country to confirm an initial avian-flu outbreak this month, doubling the number of nations reporting infections since 2003.

In Asia, almost 200 million domestic poultry have died or been culled to contain its spread, costing affected countries about \$10 billion, according to the Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

--Editor: Hallam

[Back to Index](#)