

Bird Flu News 8-15 August 2006

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CDC puts genetic sequences of bird 'flu viruses into public domain

August 08, 2006

Scientists at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control have placed the genetic blueprints of about 40 H5N1 viruses isolated from human bird 'flu cases in Indonesia into one public access database.

They will log the huge new collection into another database as well, the director of the agency's influenza division said yesterday.

The move to put the data in the public domain, giving scientists from around the world free access, came after the Indonesian government told the World Health Organization on Thursday that it was willing to share the genetic sequences of all H5N1 viruses isolated from humans there.

"We feel this is a public health problem of global proportion and that therefore it is in the best interest of global public health to have the data available for as many creative minds and well-trained minds as possible," Dr. Nancy Cox, director of the CDC's influenza division, said in an interview with The Canadian Press.

The data show that the viruses that have infected people in Indonesia were sensitive to the 'flu drug oseltamivir (sold as Tamiflu), but that resistance to another class of 'flu drugs may be increasing in that country.

Cox said she hoped the Indonesian decision would create a domino effect, spurring other countries to agree to share the genetic sequences of H5N1 viruses they have collected.

She didn't name names. But the government of Turkey has never agreed to share the genetic codes of viruses from an outbreak in January. And China has been criticized in the past for sharing only a few of its isolates, and slowly at that.

"It's a very positive step on the part of the Indonesian government and ministry of health. And I hope that other countries will follow suit," Cox said.

One of the things scientists will see by studying the Indonesian sequence data is that a number of viruses showed resistance to the antiviral drugs known as the adamantanes—amantadine and rimantadine.

These older, generic drugs are substantially cheaper than Tamiflu and Relenza, the newer class of 'flu drugs called neuraminidase inhibitors.

While H5N1 viruses circulating in some other countries, like China, have shown resistance to the adamantane drugs for some time, Indonesian viruses have generally been vulnerable to the drugs.

But CDC scientists saw a number of adamantane-resistant viruses, and there may be a trend emerging, Cox said.

"It's hard to say, really. But I would say that among the most recent viruses we've seen, a greater proportion were resistant," she noted.

Source: Fort Frances Times - ON, Canada

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Mild form of H7N7 bird flu found in Netherlands

Aug. 9, 2006



Bird flu found on a central Dutch poultry farm this month is a mild form of the H7N7 strain of the virus, the Dutch agriculture ministry announced on Wednesday.

According to Dutch media, the virus is a "low pathogenic variety" which is not as dangerous as the strain that hit the country in 2003.

In 2003, the Netherlands was hit hard by an epidemic of the H7N7 strain which led to the cull of 25 million birds, about one quarter of the country's poultry population at the time. One veterinarian died.

Bird flu viruses are divided into subtypes and named on the basis of two proteins on the surface of the virus: hemagglutinin (H) and neuraminidase (N).

The H5N1 bird flu virus is potentially lethal to humans. H7 infection in humans is rare, but can occur among people who have direct contact with infected birds.

On August 1, the Netherlands reported that it had found traces of bird flu during routine testing at a poultry farm in Voorthuizen in the central Netherlands, but no sick animals have been found.

As a precautionary measure, 25,000 chickens were culled from Voorthuizen and surrounding farms.

Editor: Yangtze Yan: www.chinaview.cn

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PM calls for strict bird flu vigilance

09-08-2006

HA NOI — Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung has asked health authorities to take all necessary steps to prevent an outbreak of avian flu and A-type flu (H5N1) among humans.



He was speaking at a conference yesterday held by the Steering Committee for Bird Flu Control along with Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Sinh Hung and representatives of related ministries.

The PM praised the efforts by sectors and localities in controlling avian flu, including efforts to mobilise the community in preventing and combating the epidemic. These efforts have been appreciated by the world, he said.

He said the danger of the epidemic returning was high, since other countries, especially those sharing land borders with Viet Nam, were now experiencing outbreaks.

He asked authorities to increase people's awareness and called for strict monitoring of the epidemic, particularly in transporting poultry. He asked ministries, sectors and localities to implement synchronous measures to prevent avian flu and H5N1 in humans.

He asked the Vietnam News Agency, Viet Nam Television, Voice of Viet Nam, Nhan Dan (The People) and other dailies to co-ordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Health to further educate the public on the threats posed by the flu.

Cities and provinces should get ready to vaccinate for the second spell this year, and increase their cleaning-up operations in affected areas. Regarding H5N1 in humans, the PM asked the Ministry of Health to increase awareness, set up facilities and store medicines especially at district health care centres. The PM asked border provinces to enforce the ban on transporting illegal poultry via borders through organising patrols and strictly punishing offenders. He asked the Ministry of Trade to temporarily stop poultry and poultry product imports from countries affected by bird flu. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, since early this year the country had not experienced bird flu and no H5N1 cases on people were reported.

- Source — VNS

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Jakarta defends bird flu efforts as death toll rises

August 10, 2006

Jakarta/Amsterdam: Indonesia yesterday lashed out at critics of its efforts to combat bird flu, which has killed 44 citizens since July last year. Two teenagers were confirmed on Tuesday as Indonesia's latest fatalities from the H5N1 virus, which was first detected in humans here just over a year ago and has spread steadily across 28 of the country's 33 provinces.

Welfare Minister Aburizal Bakrie said Indonesia had received virtually no international financial support despite pledges of cash, but had slaughtered millions of birds.

"It is untrue ... that Indonesia is hesitant to act on both issues, one suggesting that we are hesitant to use our own money and the other to perform culling," Bakrie said.

Meanwhile, Five countries have banned imports of Dutch poultry and poultry products after the Netherlands found a low-pathogenic H7 bird flu strain at a farm last week, the Dutch agriculture ministry said yesterday.

The countries, which have imposed blanket or partial bans on Dutch poultry imports are Russia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, a ministry spokeswoman said.

- Source: Gulf News - Dubai, United Arab Emirates

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Authorities assert 'no bird flu mutation in Thailand'

Aug 10, 2006

Thailand's Public Health Ministry has assured the public that the country's anti-bird flu measures are approved by the World Health Organization (WHO) and reasserted that there has been no mutation of the H5N1 virus here.

Public Health Minister Pinij Jarusombat said that the bird flu virus detected in the country is the H5N1 virus and it has not mutated into another form.

His statement followed a warning by virologist Dr. Prasert Thongcharoen that the world is keeping a close watch on China, Indonesia and Thailand as countries where the H5N1 mutation --if it happens--will likely occur.

Mr. Pinij argued that there was no such a warning from the UN agency. "We regularly report the current situation to the World Health Organization and work with it, but the WHO has never given us such the warning."

However, Mr. Pinit conceded that the diagnosis of bird flu was difficult, as there are many suspect cases with flu-like symptoms.

He said that the first lab tests did not detect the H5N1 virus in two bird flu patients who have died recently, but that follow-up lab tests showed that they were infected with bird flu.

Mr. Pinij ordered more research be conducted on these cases for improved diagnosis of avian flu in humans. (TNA)-E004

- Source: Thai News Agency MCOT - Bangkok, Thailand

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Delay in identifying 1st bird flu case explained

2006-08-11

TOP Chinese health officials have blamed a lack of communication between researchers and health officials for the delay in confirming the mainland's first human case of bird flu.

"This incident exposes problems in our scientific research institutes," Vice Health Minister Jiang Zuojun said yesterday.

Comments by Jiang and other officials followed confirmation on Tuesday by the Ministry of Health that the country's first human case of H5N1 bird flu occurred in November 2003, two years earlier than previously thought.

Research institutes were not required to report infectious diseases until December 2004, when the law on prevention and control of infectious diseases was revised to include bird flu as a disease that must be reported, Jiang said.

"In the future, scientific research institutes must improve communication and contact with our disease prevention organizations," he said.

Jiang pointed out that it took time for researchers to identify the disease in 2003 during the SARS outbreak when diagnosis methods for emerging diseases were poor. They had to be cautious in the DNA sequencing and epidemiological and genetic studies of the virus, he said. Jiang gave assurances that it was the only case that failed to fit the symptoms of SARS, adding they had no evidence of other bird flu cases before 2003.

The ministry's confirmation on Tuesday followed a letter published by eight Chinese scientists in the June 22 issue of The New England Journal of Medicine saying the virus had been isolated in a 24-year-old man who died in Beijing in 2003.

The man, surnamed Shi, became ill with pneumonia and a respiratory illness and died four days after being hospitalized. Attention at the time was focused on SARS. The man was misdiagnosed with SARS.

- Source: Shanghai Daily - Shanghai, China

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Vietnam finds more bird flu-infected fowl in south

11 Aug 2006

Vietnam, worried about a recurrence of the H5N1 bird flu which has already killed 42 of its people, has found more ducks and geese infected with a strain of avian influenza, state media reported on Friday.

The Saigon Giai Phong (Liberation Saigon) newspaper quoted Dong Manh Hoa, head of the Ho Chi Minh City Regional Veterinary Centre, as saying tests of the waterfowl in Tien Giang, Long An and Ben Tre provinces revealed the H5 subtype virus.

A Ben Tre official told Reuters on Thursday more than 50 healthy waterfowl had been killed in the province after tests showed they had the H5 subtype, but there had been no outbreaks.

The H5N1 virus swept across much of Asia in late 2003 and, although it has shown no signs of doing so yet, experts fear it could mutate into a form that can pass easily between people, triggering a pandemic which might kill millions.

It has not killed anyone in Vietnam this year, but recurrences in Thailand, Laos and China have alarmed Hanoi officials worried their country has become complacent. In an urgent directive issued on Thursday, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung told officials "to focus strongly on instructing and deploying forces to carry out synchronised, preventive measures".

Officials say a failure to control waterfowl, which can be silent carriers of bird flu, made Vietnam vulnerable to new outbreaks and wild birds believed to carry H5N1 would migrate soon from the north, raising the risk of outbreaks.

Farmers in the Mekong Delta have been raising ducks in large numbers despite a ban on breeding waterfowl due to remain in place until February 2007.

At this time of year, when a rice harvest is underway in the region, ducks usually roam from field to field feeding on spilled grain.

- Source: Reuters

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Czech scientists find promising compound to fight bird flu

Aug 14, 2006

Prague - Czech scientists have discovered a compound that may become the key ingredient in an effective drug against the bird-flu virus, the director of a Prague research institute said Monday.

'One of our compounds is active against the virus,' Zdenek Havlas, director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry, told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa.

'It's a long way from being active to (getting) the drug,' he said. 'But definitely I have hope.'

The compound is the most promising in a batch of hundreds of compounds developed at the institute recently as part of the global search for bird-flu drugs.

Havlas said the compounds were sent to the institute's research partner, the US pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, for further tests.

The goal is to find a drug that can kill the H5N1 strain of the bird-flu virus which, according to the World Health Organization, has jumped to humans from birds since 2003 and killed 138 people in 10 countries.

Disease-preventing vaccines against H5N1 are being developed. But bird flu is one of many so-called RNA viruses that burrow into a victim's cells and for which 'generally there is nothing' to treat infected patients, Havlas said.

The Czech compound meets some basic criteria required for a drug against bird flu, such as low toxicity.

But Havlas said work is needed on a 'transport' mechanism. 'It must be chemically modified to get it into target cells and the viruses' which is 'very hard work,' he said.

Gilead is now responsible for taking the research to the next level, although Havlas said the work could take 'several years.'

Thousands of researchers worldwide are currently racing to find drugs that can fight bird flu.

Experts warn that the virus' spread from Asia to Europe and Africa in recent years could be a forerunner to a global pandemic like the Spanish flu that killed millions around World War I.

Czech scientists already have a good track record for developing anti-viral compounds.

Some have been developed into drugs for fighting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and others have shown promise for use in medicine against Hepatitis C.

- Source: *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*

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Avian influenza – situation in China – WHO update 14

14 August 2006

The Ministry of Health in China has confirmed the country's 21st case of human infection with the H5N1 avian influenza virus.

The case occurred in a 62-year-old male farmer from the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in the north-western part of the country. He developed symptoms on 19 June and died on 12 July. Initial tests on patient specimens produced negative results. As a precautionary measure, tests were repeated during July and August and eventually produced positive results, which were confirmed today by the Ministry of Health.

An epidemiological investigation of the case was unable to uncover a history of exposure to dead or diseased birds. The man had no history of travel during the month prior to symptom onset. No recent poultry outbreaks have been reported in the vicinity of the man's home. The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region had not previously reported a human case.

Of the 21 cases confirmed to date in China, 14 have been fatal.

- Source: *World Health Organization*

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Avian influenza – situation in Indonesia – WHO update 26

14 August 2006

The Ministry of Health in Indonesia has confirmed the country's 57th case of human infection with the H5N1 avian influenza virus.

The case is a 17-year-old male from a remote village in Garut district, West Java Province. He developed symptoms on 26 July and was referred to hospital on 9 August. At the hospital, medical staff suspected H5N1 infection based on his respiratory symptoms and a history of exposure to dead poultry. Because of this suspicion, specimens were collected from the patient and sent for testing. Results received on 12 August were positive for H5N1 infection. The patient is presently recovering.

A thorough field investigation found that chicken and duck deaths occurred in the patient's household and neighborhood during the week prior to symptom onset. The case reportedly had direct contact with diseased chickens during the disposal of carcasses.

The investigation also obtained information about a 20-year-old male who lived in a neighbouring household where chickens were also dying. The man developed symptoms on 26 July and sought care at the local health centre on 5 August. He died of respiratory disease on 6 August, before arrangements could be made for transfer to hospital and before samples could be taken for testing. The cause of his illness and death remain undetermined.

Of the 57 cases confirmed to date in Indonesia, 44 have been fatal.

- Source: World Health Organization

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Cumulative Number of Confirmed Human Cases of Avian Influenza

14 August 2006

Country	2003		2004		2005		2006		Total	
	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths
Azerbaijan	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	5	8	5
Cambodia	0	0	0	0	4	4	2	2	6	6
China	1	1	0	0	8	5	12	8	21	14
Djibouti	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Egypt	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	6	14	6
Indonesia	0	0	0	0	17	11	40	33	57	44
Iraq	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2
Thailand	0	0	17	12	5	2	2	2	24	16
Turkey	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	4	12	4
Viet Nam	3	3	29	20	61	19	0	0	93	42
Total	4	4	46	32	95	41	93	62	238	139

Total number of cases includes number of deaths.

WHO reports only laboratory-confirmed cases.

- Source: World Health Organization

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New Avian Flu Center Awards First Grant to Laos

15 August 2006



A new Avian flu center, created by the World Bank, has awarded its first grant to Laos for projects aimed at controlling and preparing for bird flu outbreaks.

The Avian and Human Influenza Facility announced Tuesday that it approved a \$2 million grant for Laos.

The center was created by the World Bank with donations from eight donor agencies, including the European Commission. It says the grants are to help developing countries prepare and implement action plans designed to reduce the social and economic impact of the bird flu virus.

The bank's department that processes grants for the Avian Flu facility says it is committed to helping Laos make sure its people can benefit from quality public health care as well as reforms in the animal health system.

- *By VOA News*

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Bird flu kills 1,800 ducks in China, 210,000 culled

15 Aug 2006

About 1,800 ducks have died from bird flu at a farm in central China and more than 210,000 have been culled, the online edition of Xinhua news agency said on Tuesday.

A total of 1,805 ducks have died at the farm in Changsha, capital of Hunan province, since the first poultry death was reported on Aug. 4, Xinhuanet (www.xinhuanet.com) quoted the agriculture ministry as saying.

About 217,000 ducks at the farm have been culled, Xinhuanet said.

A national laboratory confirmed on Monday the ducks had died from the H5N1 bird flu virus, it said.

About 40 bird flu outbreaks in poultry have been reported in a dozen Chinese provinces in the past year.

On Monday, the Health Ministry said a 62-year-old farmer from Jimsar county in the northwestern region of Xinjiang died on July 12 from the H5N1 strain, bringing the nationwide bird flu death toll to 14.

It was 21st human case of bird flu in China.

- *Source: Reuters*

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