

1. Bird flu outbreak in Turkey ends.....	1
2. Bird flu endemic in Hong Kong, health secretary reports	2
3. Bird flu death in Indonesia up to 16.....	2
4. Bulgaria detects possible case of bird flu	3
5. Turkey lauded for response to bird flu.....	3
6. New Test Quickly Spots Bird Flu in People	4
7. No need to upgrade anti-bird flu measures in Macao.....	5

1. Bird flu outbreak in Turkey ends

ISTANBUL, Turkey (AP) - The last four suspected bird flu patients - two of them confirmed to have contracted the deadly H5N1 strain - were discharged from a hospital in eastern Turkey, signalling an end to the recent outbreak, a doctor said Saturday.

There were no bird flu patients left in any hospital in Turkey, a Health Ministry official said, suggesting the outbreak might have come to an end. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because Turkish civil servants cannot speak to media without prior authorization.

The two children confirmed with bird flu had both been in critical condition before improving drastically and being released on Friday.

"The children were under treatment for nearly a month, and they were sent home after they apparently recovered from bird flu," said Dr. Ahmet Faik Oner from the Van 100th Year Hospital, where the four confirmed deaths from bird flu in Turkey occurred.

"The crisis in Van is 95-per cent over" Oner told The Associated Press. "There might be sporadic (bird flu) cases in the future, but I don't think we'll face a new epidemic."

The two children were relatives of Fatma Ozcan, the last of four children who died of bird flu in Turkey.

Two other people who were treated for bird flu, though neither had confirmed infections, also were released Friday from the hospital in Van.

A total of 21 people tested positive for the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu since the outbreak began in December, the government's bird flu crisis centre said.

Turkey has destroyed more than 1.6 million fowl across the country to contain the virus and limit contact between fowl and humans.

The bird flu virus has so far only jumped from poultry to people, killing at least 85 people in east Asia and Turkey since 2003.

Experts fear that if the strain is not contained, it could mutate into a form spread easily among humans, triggering a pandemic capable of killing millions.

2. Bird flu endemic in Hong Kong, health secretary reports

Bird flu appears to be taking root in Hong Kong now that it has surfaced in both local wild birds and chicken, the territory's health secretary said on Friday.

"It's not just Hong Kong. This virus will exist in neighboring areas, southern China as well as Hong Kong," York Chow said at a news conference.

"Since different kinds of wild birds and chickens have this virus, we can be quite sure that this virus is endemic in our birds," he said.

Later, health bureau spokeswoman Sally Kong said Chow meant that bird flu is endemic in Asia, not Hong Kong specifically.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization says an area is considered endemic after tests determine a cycle of disease recurrence within a given area, and that the virus hasn't simply been imported from another place.

All of the bird flu endemic countries -- Vietnam, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand -- have large domestic poultry stocks and vast rice fields where backyard farms are common among villagers.

Chow's comments came after the government announced on Wednesday that both a local chicken brought in from China and a dead crested myna tested positive for the H5N1 bird flu virus. In the past year, Hong Kong officials also found avian flu in two other species.

Previously, bird flu killed six people in Hong Kong in 1997, prompting the government to slaughter the entire poultry population of about 1.5 million birds.

But since then, there have been no major outbreaks. Hong Kong has been largely spared from the recent outbreaks that have killed or forced the slaughter of millions of birds across Asia since late 2003.

Chow urged the public not to panic, saying bird flu doesn't pose a serious threat to Hong Kong's urban residents -- except those who work in the poultry industry or raise chickens at home. The infected chicken whose test results were announced earlier this week was being kept in a local household.

3. Bird flu death in Indonesia up to 16

Bird flu deaths in Indonesia have reached 16, as two people were confirmed by the world Health Organization on Saturday, an official of Indonesian Health ministry said.

A director at the health ministry Haryadi Wibisonon told Xinhua by telephone that a World Health Organization-sanctioned laboratory in Hong Kong has confirmed a 22-year-old man, Yasinda, and a 15-year-old man, Yedi, died of bird flu.

They died one week ago, he added.

He said the test of blood of Humariah, a 5-year-old girl, and Herdiyansa, a 5-year-old boy, also showed positive. but they are still alive. So the number of bird flu cases in the country has reached 23.

Bird flu began ravaging poultry stocks across Asia in 2003 -- killing or forcing the slaughter of an estimated 140 million birds. It also jumped to humans, killing at least 85 people in Asia and Turkey.

Almost all the deaths have been linked to contact with infected poultry, but experts fear the virus could mutate into a form that spreads easily among humans, sparking a pandemic that could kill millions.

In Indonesia, 25 of 33 provinces have found bird flu cases and about 9 million infected poultry had been killed.

4. Bulgaria detects possible case of bird flu

The Bulgarian authorities said on Friday that a dead swan on its border with Romania is suspected of having contracted the bird flu virus, and samples will be sent to Britain for further tests.

Agriculture Minister Nihat Kabil said "The wild swan, which test data showed to be infected with the H5 virus, was found in the Danube river near the town of Vidin".

He said that his government had informed European veterinary authorities of the case and that samples from the swan were being prepared for further tests in the EU-registered laboratory in Britain, since Bulgaria itself lacks the ability to conduct the complex tests to determine whether this specific strain of H5 is the H5N1 that has led to the deaths of 86 people.

The country's neighbors, Romania and Turkey, have both suffered outbreaks of H5N1 avian flu since last October, and Bulgaria has banned poultry from these two countries. It has also asked farmers to keep fowl indoors, and intensified surveillance on wetland areas.

5. Turkey lauded for response to bird flu

TURKISH authorities were praised yesterday for their swift handling of the country's bird flu outbreak, which has killed four people.

Quick identification of influenza in chickens, immediate culling and careful monitoring of people exposed to the virus have all helped contain an outbreak of bird flu in the country, according to Dr Joseph Bresee, an expert in the disease.

Hospitals also used effective measures to control infection, including the anti-flu drug, Tamiflu, and triage to sort urgent cases from less serious ones, said Dr Bresee, who heads the epidemiology section in the influenza branch of the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

"This is a good opportunity to show how well things can go," Dr Bresee said after his return from eastern Turkey.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has confirmed 12 cases of human H5N1 infection in Turkey. Another nine potential cases are being studied.

Bulgaria yesterday said it had discovered its first case of bird flu, in a swan in the Danube river. Authorities said samples would be sent to Britain for testing.

Meanwhile, the WHO said yesterday it was sending several thousand courses of Tamiflu to Iraq to help treat any further cases of deadly bird flu in humans.

The United Nations' health agency has already announced that a team, including veterinary experts, is on the way to investigate the situation in the north after a teenager died last month from the virus.

In Hong Kong, the territory's health secretary said bird flu appeared to be taking root in Asia now that it had surfaced in local wild birds and chickens.

"It's not just Hong Kong. This virus will exist in neighbouring areas - southern China as well as Hong Kong," York Chow said at a news conference.

6. New Test Quickly Spots Bird Flu in People

U.S. health officials announced Friday the approval of a new rapid lab test to detect bird flu in humans.

The test works by detecting viral genetic material, which, in turn, is used to demonstrate the presence of bird-flu infection.

It was developed by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration within two weeks.

"The approval provides CDC and its Laboratory Response Network with a powerful tool to allow early detection of avian flu should it appear in the United States," Dr. Steve I. Gutman, director of the FDA's Office of In Vitro Diagnostics Device Evaluation and Safety at the Center for Devices and Radiological Health, said at a press briefing.

"Timely detection of avian flu has obvious benefit to patients who have been infected and can help stop the spread of this disease," he added.

Since December 2003, more than 150 human cases of bird, or avian, flu caused by the H5N1 strain of the virus have been reported, mostly in Southeast Asia, Turkey and Iraq, and 85 people have died. The virus is especially virulent, killing more than half of those infected.

So far, exposure seems to have been limited to contact with infected poultry. Experts are concerned, however, that the virus will mutate and gain the ability to skip easily and quickly from human to human, triggering a pandemic.

The virus is not currently circulating in North America.

The new test, called the Influenza A/H5 (Asian lineage) Virus Real-time RT-PCR Primer and Probe Set, will be used in the CDC's network of about 140 labs in all 50 states.

A person with suspected bird-flu infection would provide a sample of a respiratory secretion (either through a swab or aspiration) to health-care professionals at a clinic, emergency room or doctor's office. That sample would then be sent to a lab, which should be able to

perform the test and generate results in two to four hours, Gutman said. Previous technology required a minimum of two to three days, he said.

Stephan S. Monroe, acting director of the CDC's Division of Viral and Rickettsial Diseases, said 87 percent of the U.S. population lives within one hour of one of these labs, so getting a sample to a lab for testing should not cause a time lag.

There are some caveats with the test, however. It generates a "presumptive" positive rather than a definitive positive, meaning that further testing and "careful interpretation" would still have to be conducted by the CDC.

"A negative test does not conclusively rule out the possibility of avian flu," Gutman explained. "It's not intended for general screening of individuals in the general population. It's intended for use in patients with severe respiratory illness who have had a risk of exposure, such as travel or contact with suspicious birds."

Because the CDC is part of the World Health Organization's collaborating network for influenza, the test will be shared with labs around the world.

The test was developed solely with government funding, but officials said the private sector had expressed considerable interest. Officials also said the expedited review process would be open to other companies developing diagnostic tests.

The speed of the test's approval was exceeded only by that of the West Nile virus test, which took four days.

"It's not a record but it's still awfully good," Gutman said.

7. No need to upgrade anti-bird flu measures in Macao

Lau Si Io, president of Macao's Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau (CMAB), has said that there was "no need" to upgrade anti-bird flu measures, local media reported Friday.

The official told the Macao Post Daily that however, the Macao concerned authorities are to pay close attention to the bird flu situation and to maintain tight contact with the Chinese mainland health agencies.

Lau said the CMAB has registered 140 dead bird reports since last October and none of the cases tested positive for the avian flu up to now.

He said the daily inspections on the migratory birds and the poultry slaughtering will be continued.