

**Hong Kong Confirms 5th Bird With H5N1 Avian Flu Virus (Update1)
2006-02-07 03:46 (New York)**

(Adds comment from UN agency spokesman in fourth paragraph.)

By Joshua Fellman and Jason Gale

Feb. 7 (Bloomberg) -- Hong Kong said a fifth bird tested positive for the H5N1 strain of avian influenza in a new wave of outbreaks that has prompted local officials to seek a ban on private ownership of poultry.

A magpie collected by the Agriculture and Fisheries Department on Feb. 2 in the Tuen Mun district of suburban New Territories died the following day, the Hong Kong government said in a faxed statement yesterday. The virus was confirmed by laboratory tests, it said.

The city is struggling to prevent illegal smuggling of poultry from China's mainland and is trying to cull poultry to stem the spread of the H5N1 virus, which risks sparking a potentially lethal influenza pandemic. An H5N1 outbreak there in 1997 prompted one of the world's largest bird culls, when almost 1.5 million fowl were destroyed in three days.

``Even in Hong Kong, where awareness about avian influenza is high, there are still incidents of inappropriate behavior," said Peter Cordingley, a spokesman with the World Health Organization in Manila. ``Chickens imported from China are subject to rigorous health checks, and smuggling them into Hong Kong without these checks poses a health threat."

Hong Kong vaccinates all legally imported poultry and all the dead birds found to have been infected with H5N1 recently were wild. Separately, a chicken illegally imported from mainland China also tested positive for the virus.

``Maximum Caution'

``The fact that another wild bird has been found to be infected with H5N1 in Hong Kong shows that the virus is probably present in the vicinity and that the public needs to exercise maximum caution," Cordingley said.

The H5N1 avian flu virus was first reported in 1996 in China's southern Guangdong Province. Authorities in China have not reported any outbreaks in poultry in that province since 2004, Cordingley said. ``However, Chinese authorities have acknowledged that surveillance in chickens needs to be improved."

The government of Shenzhen, the mainland city adjoining Hong Kong, has increased monitoring of the loading of chickens being sent to Hong Kong and is giving them health checks at the boarder, Hong Kong Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food York Chow said.

Chow said he's concerned about the origin of the chicken that tested positive for H5N1 and said it was impossible to determine whether the bird contracted the virus before its purchase in China or after it arrived in Hong Kong.

Shenzen Birds

Hong Kong may reduce the number of live chickens it allows to be imported into the city from Shenzhen if there's a continuous outbreak of H5N1 in either Hong Kong or southern China, Chow said.

Chow said on Feb. 3 that legislation prohibiting private ownership of poultry may be in place as early the next week. His department is also recommending a fine of HK\$50,000-HK\$100,000 (\$6,444-\$12,888) for violations, he said. Current Hong Kong legislation allows private poultry ownership of no more than 20 birds.

The disease in birds creates more opportunity for human infection and increases the risk of the virus changing into a form that is more contagious to people. Such a virus may touch off a pandemic similar to the one that killed as many as 50 million people in 1918.

The H5N1 virus has killed at least 88 of the 165 people known to have been infected, the World Health Organization said on Feb. 6.

Hong Kong's current wave of bird flu outbreaks probably began a month ago, when an adult Oriental magpie robin was found dead on Jan. 10, the World Organization for Animal Health said in a report on its Web site.

The magpie had a variant of the virus the same as that previously found in birds in southern China, Japan and South Korea, the Paris-based organization said.

[More Testing Needed to Track Multiplying Avian Flu Mutations](#) 2006-02-06 17:00 (New York)

By John Lauerman

Feb. 6 (Bloomberg) -- New strains of avian influenza are multiplying in birds, and more testing is needed to head off disease outbreaks that might spark a lethal influenza pandemic in humans, according to a study.

At least four major strains of H5N1 influenza are circulating in poultry and wild birds, said Robert Webster, a St. Jude Children's Research Hospital researcher who led the study. While not all of the strains cause symptoms, they might still change into deadly forms of the infection, he said.

Health officials should start regular testing of healthy birds to find H5N1 infections, instead of depending on testing birds that are found dead, Webster said in a telephone interview from his laboratory in Hong Kong. This means countries such as China may have to devote more financial resources to testing and manpower to find outbreaks, Webster said.

"What this says to the world is if they want to know about this virus they have to do prospective surveillance," he said Feb. 1. "They can't rely on dead chickens, dead ducks or dead geese to tell them where and when to test."

Testing of 13,115 specimens shows that H5N1 is still established in poultry populations in southern China, and new strains of the virus are arising all the time, Webster said.

“As long as it's out there, it's evolving and it's a danger to humans,” he said.

Webster and his collaborators in Hong Kong first identified the avian influenza that researchers fear may mutate into a form dangerous to humans in 1997. Since then, the H5N1 virus has spread from Asia to Eastern Europe and now the Middle East.

200 Million Birds

At least 200 million birds have been killed by the virus or culled to keep it from spreading, said Tim Uyeki, a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention epidemiologist, at a Feb. 1 conference in Washington. Health officials vaccinate healthy birds, and destroy sick ones and their flocks, as a way to control the spread of infection.

Live birds infected with H5N1 help the virus keep spreading and evolving, possibly into a strain that would begin going from human to human. Some Asian countries, such as Thailand are aware of the necessity of testing healthy birds for the virus and culling them if necessary. China hasn't yet dedicated the resources needed for this, Webster said.

“They've relied on vaccination and culling birds with signs of disease,” he said. “The whole world has to be doing it, Turkey and Iraq and China and the whole caboodle.”

Aggressive Approach

Countries are racing to develop vaccines and buy antivirals, such as Roche Holding AG's Tamiflu and GlaxoSmithKline Plc's Relenza, to prepare to fight the emergence of a highly lethal influenza strain. Sanofi-Aventis SA, the world's biggest producer of flu shots, said today that it shipped 15,000 doses of an experimental vaccine to the U.S.

The development of new viral strains among poultry in places like southern China suggests that a more aggressive approach to infection control in domestic birds might reduce the danger from H5N1, said Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The Bethesda, Maryland-based agency funds Webster's Hong Kong lab.

“We could go a long way to eliminate this with control in birds,” he said Feb. 3 in a telephone interview.

Continued testing of birds might also give researchers clues about which form the virus would most likely to take if it mutates into a germ that's contagious to humans, he said.

“By tracking the molecular profiles of this virus, you can be ahead of the game,” he said. “You can get ahead of it by watching the virus evolve in chickens.”

The study will appear on-line this week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

WHO teams in Iraq to fight bird flu

Sunday 05 February 2006, 20:59 GMT

An eight-member WHO team flew into the region's main city of Arbil and was set to meet, later on Sunday, with



Jamal Abdul Hameed, health minister in its autonomous administration.

Another two-member team of WHO veterinarians arrived in Baghdad on Saturday and will head to Arbil on Monday to assist their colleagues from the other team.

"At the moment this is an agricultural emergency," said Sam Yingst, a member of the team in Baghdad.

"But we believe that there is a possibility that it may become a human public emergency though it will require a significant change in the nature of the virus."

A massive cull of poultry has been underway in the northern Kurdistan region after an outbreak of the H5N1 strain of the avian influenza virus among birds.

The disease, which struck after hitting neighbouring Turkey last month, has claimed at least one human life in Iraq and a handful of other cases are under investigation.

Bulgaria to supply Tamiflu to prevent spread of bird flu

www.chinaview.cn 2006-02-05 20:44:53

SOFIA, Feb. 5 (Xinhuanet) -- Bulgarian authorities said on Sunday it will supply all veterinary departments and the units of the Civil Defense across the country with Tamiflu to prevent the spread of bird flu.

The antiviral drug will be dispensed mainly to districts at highest risk of avian flu outbreaks, such as wet zones along the Danube River, the Black Sea and reservoirs in Central Bulgaria, said Deputy Premier and Disaster Management Minister Emel Etem.

Bulgaria reported dozens of dead waterfowl in its wet zones on Saturday, a day after it confirmed its first case of bird flu in a dead swan found four days ago.

Totally 17 swans have been found dead in the area of the Black Sea cities Varna and Burgas, and at the Durankulak lakes. A pelican and a falcon have also been found dead in areas along the Danube River, which separates Bulgaria from Romania.

All birds have been sent to Sofia for tests, Etem said.

The official said that the case of bird flu on Friday was not equal to the conclusion that the deadly avian virus had already spread out in the territory of Bulgaria.

But the situation now is becoming more and more serious and tough, he added.

Bulgaria established the Crisis Staff of avian flu right after the outbreak of the epidemic that could be dangerous to humans in the neighboring Romania and Turkey last October.

Since then, the government has banned poultry from its neighbors, forbidden the hunting of wild birds, urged farmers to keep domestic fowl indoors and stepped up surveillance of migratory birds in wetland areas.

In Turkey, the World Health Organization has confirmed 12 human cases, four of which were fatal.

Avian influenza – situation in Indonesia - update 2

6 February 2006

The Ministry of Health in Indonesia has confirmed an additional four cases of human infection with the H5N1 avian influenza virus. Two of these cases were fatal.

The first fatal case was a 22-year-old man from West Java who died on 26 January. He worked as a banana vendor at a market in East Jakarta where poultry meat was sold. Neighbours near his home reported poultry deaths prior to his onset of symptoms.

The second fatal case was a 15-year-old boy from West Java who died on 1 February. Deaths in chickens near his home were reported in the week prior to symptom onset.

The third case is a nine-year old girl from West Java who was hospitalized on 19 January and has since recovered. She lived in a village neighbouring that of the two fatal cases in siblings confirmed on 23 January. Investigation of those cases resulted in the girl's prompt hospitalization and treatment. She has now fully recovered. Poultry deaths were reported in her village prior to symptom onset.

The fourth case is a five-year-old boy from Lampung Province who developed symptoms in October of last year and has since fully recovered. The child is the brother of a previously confirmed case, a 20-year-old man who developed symptoms in late September and likewise fully recovered. Both the child and his brother had direct exposure to diseased chickens during slaughtering. As initial diagnostic tests produced inconclusive results, retrospective confirmation of the child's infection relied on antibody levels in acute blood samples taken during his illness and convalescent samples taken following recovery.

All three cases with recent symptom onset resided in West Java, where a resurgence of virus activity in birds has been reported.

The newly confirmed cases bring the total in Indonesia to 23. Of these cases, 16 were fatal.

SOURCE: http://www.who.int/csr/don/2006_02_06/en/print.html

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

6 February 2006

Country	2003		2004		2005		2006		Total	
	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths
Cambodia	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	0	4	4
China	0	0	0	0	8	5	2	2	10	7
Indonesia	0	0	0	0	17	11	6	5	23	16
Iraq	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Thailand	0	0	17	12	5	2	0	0	22	14
Turkey	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	4	12	4
Viet Nam	3	3	29	20	61	19	0	0	93	42
Total	3	3	46	32	95	41	21	12	165	88

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

SOURCE:

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/cases_table_2006_02_06/en/print.html