

Beat: Miscellaneous

4 more diagnosed with new bird flu virus in China

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USPA News - Four more people in eastern China have been diagnosed with a new strain of avian influenza that had never before been transmitted to humans, health authorities said on Tuesday, two days after announcing the first three human cases in the same region. The Jiangsu Provincial Health Department said laboratory tests confirmed one man and three women are suffering from avian influenza, better known as bird flu, after they became ill in recent weeks.

The tests showed they contracted H7N9, a relatively new strain not seen in humans before. Authorities said a 45-year-old woman from Jiangning District, who was involved in the slaughter of poultry, became ill on March 19 with fever, dizziness, body aches, fatigue and other symptoms. She went to the provincial capital of Nanjing on March 27 to seek medical treatment at a local hospital, where she remains in a critical condition. Another patient is a 48-year-old woman from Suqian who also became ill on March 19 with fever, dizziness and coughing. She was taken to a hospital in Nanjing on March 30 and remains in a critical condition. Health authorities said her work involved the processing of sheet metal, but it is unclear if she has recently been in direct contact with poultry. The third patient is an 83-year-old man from Suzhou Wujiang District who became ill on March 20, suffering from fever, cough, sputum production, chest pain and shortness of breath. He was taken to a local hospital on March 29 where he remains in a critical condition, according to the health department. The fourth patient is a 32-year-old unemployed woman who is originally from Changzhou but now lives in Wuxi. She became ill on March 21 when she began experiencing fever, cough and other symptoms, doctors said. She was taken to a local hospital in Wuxi on March 31 where she remains in a critical condition. Health authorities have so far been in touch with 167 close contacts of the four patients, but none of them have reported having a fever or respiratory symptoms. It remains unclear how the four became infected as none of them are known to each other, and only one is confirmed to have been in direct contact with poultry. The confirmed H7N9 cases come just two days after China's National Health and Family Planning Commission said two men from Shanghai and a woman from Anhui province were also diagnosed with the virus. The two men eventually died but the woman remains in a critical condition after being hospitalized in neighboring Jiangsu province. The Chinese government has said it is closely monitoring the situation and cities in eastern provinces have stepped up public health measures as a precaution. The World Health Organization (WHO) previously said the risk to public health appears to be low as there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission, but it said the source of infection and mode of transmission are still under investigation. "The Chinese government is actively investigating this event and has instituted enhanced surveillance, laboratory strengthening and training of health care professionals for detection, reporting and treatment," WHO said in a statement on Monday, before the new cases were reported. In Hong Kong, a spokesman for the Center for Health Protection (CHP) said it would closely monitor the situation and urged members of the public to remain vigilant for possible cases of bird flu. "We will heighten our vigilance and continue to maintain stringent port health measures in connection with this development," he said on Sunday. Following the new cases, the CHP spokesman advised travelers from Shanghai, Anhui and Jiangsu with respiratory symptoms to wear facial masks, seek medical attention and reveal their travel histories to doctors. He also said healthcare professionals should pay special attention to those travelers who may have been in contact with birds or poultry in eastern China. There is no known vaccine for H7N9, but the strain is different from the well-known H5N1 variant. Since 2003, the H5N1 bird flu virus has killed or forced the culling of more than 400 million domestic poultry worldwide and caused an estimated \$20 billion in economic damage before it was eliminated from most of the 63 infected countries. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the bird flu virus has infected at least 605 people since it first appeared, killing 357 of them. Most cases and deaths were recorded in Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt and China. Vietnam, Indonesia, China and Cambodia all reported bird flu deaths last year.

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