

Beat: Miscellaneous

China reports no new H7N9 bird flu cases for second week

-, 27.05.2013, 23:39 Time

USPA News - Chinese health authorities have found no new human cases of the deadly H7N9 bird flu virus during the past two weeks, the government said on Monday, suggesting the outbreak may be over as much of the country is now experiencing warmer weather. China's National Health and Family Planning Commission said laboratory tests had found no new cases of avian influenza between May 8 and 4 p.m. local time on Monday.

H7N9 is a relatively new strain that had never before been transmitted to humans until an outbreak in eastern China in February. Health authorities have reported a total of 131 laboratory-confirmed cases, all but one of them in China, since the outbreak began. It remains unclear how the virus is spreading, but experts have previously suggested that the original virus may have mutated to allow it to infect poultry and birds without generating symptoms but sickening humans. And while some of the victims said they had no recent contact with poultry or birds, Chinese and international health authorities have stressed they have seen no credible evidence of human-to-human transmission. Experts however have warned that the virus could pose a serious risk to human health if it mutates. The National Health and Family Planning Commission said the death toll increased to 37 during the past week after one of the patients died from the illness. Four others have been discharged from hospitals during the past week, raising the number of people who have recovered from H7N9 to 76. Seventeen victims remain hospitalized. "Authorities in affected locations continue to maintain enhanced surveillance, epidemiological investigations, close contact tracing, clinical management, laboratory testing and sharing of samples as well as prevention and control measures," the World Health Organization (WHO) said last week, when the Shanghai and Zhejiang provincial governments began to transfer their emergency operations into their routine surveillance and response activities. WHO Director-General Margaret Chan, who noted that the number of new cases dropped when live poultry markets were closed, praised the Chinese government last week for its response to the outbreak. "I thank China for collecting and communicating such a wealth of information, and for collaborating so closely with WHO," she said. "Chinese officials have promptly traced, monitored, and tested thousands of patient contacts, including hundreds of health care workers." While there is no known vaccine for H7N9, 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 H5N1 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.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1023/china-reports-no-new-h7n9-bird-flu-cases-for-second-week.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619