

Beat: Health

China reports 27th death from H7N9 bird flu

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USPA News - The death toll from a new strain of avian influenza that had never before been transmitted to humans has risen to 27 after a man died in central China, health authorities said on Thursday. The total number of laboratory-confirmed cases has now reached 128. The Hunan Provincial Health Department said a 55-year-old man died Wednesday morning at a hospital in Changsha, the capital of Hunan province.

The man, who is from neighboring Jiangxi Province, was initially hospitalized at another hospital near Changsha after being ill for eleven days, and laboratory tests later confirmed he was suffering from avian influenza, which is better known as bird flu. The tests showed he had contracted H7N9, which is a relatively new strain that was until recently only known to infect birds. As of Thursday, health authorities have reported a total of 128 laboratory-confirmed cases of H7N9, including 27 deaths. It remains unclear how the virus is spreading, but experts have suggested that the virus mutated to allow it to infect poultry and birds without generating symptoms while sickening humans. 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 authorities in the affected locations continue to implement prevention and control measures," the World Health Organization said on Thursday. "Investigations into the possible sources of infection and reservoirs of the virus are ongoing. Until the source of infection has been identified and controlled, it is expected that there will be further cases of human infection with the virus." The Chinese government has said it is closely monitoring the situation and cities in eastern provinces, where most cases have been reported, have stepped up public health measures for early detection, diagnosis and treatment. Communication efforts between human and animal health and industry sectors have also been increased, while citizens have been urged to maintain good personal hygiene and avoid direct contact with sick or dead animals. 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 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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