**Beat: Miscellaneous**

# H7N9 bird flu kills 2 in China in first human cases

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**USPA News -** Two people in China`s largest city of Shanghai died this month after contracting a strain of avian influenza that had never been transmitted to humans before, health authorities said on Sunday. A third victim in China is in a critical condition.

China`s National Health and Family Planning Commission said two men from Shanghai and a woman from another region in eastern China were diagnosed with avian influenza, better known as bird flu, after they became ill with coughs and fevers before developing pneumonia. Laboratory tests confirmed Saturday that they had contracted H7N9, a strain not seen in humans before. The first known victim, an 87-year-old man from Shanghai, became ill on February 19 and passed away on March 4, according to the Commission. The second victim, a 27-year-old man who was also from Shanghai, began showing symptoms on February 27 and died at a local hospital on March 10. A 35-year-old woman from Chuzhou, a city in Anhui province, some 320 kilometers (198 miles) northwest of Shanghai, became ill on March 15. The woman was later admitted to a hospital in Nanjing, a city in neighboring Jiangsu province, and remained in a critical condition on Sunday. It is unclear how the virus infected the three victims, who do not appear to have any direct connections, but none of their relatives or friends are believed to have fallen ill. The Commission said the 27-year-old man was a butcher while the 35-year-old woman had been in contact with poultry before falling ill. The Chinese government said it is closely following the situation and has informed the World Health Organization (WHO), Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and a number of countries about the deaths. A WHO spokesman said the risk to public health appears to be low as there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission. In Hong Kong, a spokesman for the Center for Health Protection 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. 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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