

China mobilizes after fourth bird flu patient dies

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Technical staff from the animal disease prevention and control center inject chickens with the H5N1 bird flu vaccine in Shangsi county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region Wednesday.

Photo: Reuters.

China said it was mobilizing resources nationwide to combat a new strain of deadly bird flu that has killed four people, as Japan and Hong Kong stepped up vigilance against the virus and Vietnam banned imports of Chinese poultry.

The H7N9 bird flu strain does not appear to be transmitted from human to human, but authorities in Hong Kong yesterday raised a preliminary alert and said they were taking precautions at the airport.

In Japan, airports have put up posters at entry points warning all passengers from China to seek medical attention if they suspect they have bird flu.

A total of 14 people in China have been confirmed to have contracted H7N9, all in the east of the country.

Another 2 persons died yesterday, in Shanghai, bringing the number of deaths to five, state media said.

Xinhua news agency said the victim was a 48-year-old man who worked delivering poultry.

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“[China] will strengthen its leadership in combating the virus ... and coordinate and deploy the entire nation’s health system to combat the virus,” the Chinese Health Ministry said in a statement late on Wednesday on its Web site.

In Hong Kong, authorities activated the preliminary “Alert Response Level” under a preparedness plan for an influenza pandemic, which calls for close monitoring of chicken farms, vaccination, culling drills and a suspension of imports of live birds from China.

All passengers on flights in and out of Hong Kong were being asked to notify flight attendants or airport staff if they were feeling unwell.

Vietnam said it had banned poultry imports from China, citing the risks from H7N9.

Flu experts across the world are studying samples isolated from the patients to assess the human pandemic potential of the strain, because no animals infected with H7N9 have yet been found.

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