

Nation confirms its first case of H7N9 avian flu

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A picture made available yesterday shows the Bali Geese Farm in Bali, New Taipei City, on April 3.

Photo: David Chang, EPA

A 53-year-old Taiwanese man who had worked in China's Jiangsu Province has tested positive for the H7N9 avian flu virus, the Central Epidemic Command Center said yesterday.

The man, who is now in serious condition, is receiving treatment, including intubation, in a negative-pressure quarantine ward, the center said.

It marked the first confirmed human infection of the new bird flu strain in Taiwan and also the first confirmed H7N9 case outside of China, the center said.

The infection source of the first imported H7N9 case remained unknown, because he neither came into contact with poultry or other birds during his stay in Jiangsu, nor had he eaten raw or undercooked eggs or poultry while there, the center said.

The patient fell ill three days after his return from China, the center said.

According to the center, 139 people are known to have come into contact with him. Three of them had close contact, 26 had contact more than seven days ago (putting them past the infectious period) and 110 are hospital personnel, it said.

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Three of the hospital personnel did not take proper protective measures when treating or caring for the patient and have developed respiratory symptoms, the center said, adding that they would be strictly monitored until Saturday.

The center added that all those who have had contact with the patient have been notified and told to take care of their health.

They will be subject to close monitoring until the infectious period expires, the center said, adding that public health officials will help people on the watch list get medical treatment should they develop flu-like symptoms, such as fever or coughing.

According to the center, the patient is a hepatitis B carrier and also suffers from hypertension, adding that his H7N9 infection was confirmed yesterday.

The center said it had informed the WHO and China of the case earlier in the day.

China reported the world's first confirmed human infections of H7N9 on March 31, and as of Tuesday, 108 cases had been confirmed in China, with 22 deaths.

The CDC said there is still no evidence that the H7N9 virus has mutated into a form that will allow sustained person-to-person transmissions.

Later yesterday evening, the Taipei City Government launched its emergency response mechanism to provide information to the public. It also opened an avian flu hotline on (02) 2375-3782 to answer questions from those who have concerns about the flu.

Taipei City' Department of Health Chief Secretary Chiang Yu-mei (蔣玉梅) said that people with questions can also call the 1999 Citizen Hotline and that department members would assist the

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hotline staff with inquiries about the flu, and seek to reduce public panic over the first case of H7N9.

Head of the department Lin Chi-hung (林智鴻) yesterday declined to confirm whether the first H7N9 case was in Taipei, but said the department will inspect the facilities of the city's designated avian flu response hospital, Taipei Heping Hospital, and another 16 hospitals that are equipped with quarantine rooms to prevent a potential outbreak.

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