



LATEST CASE OF INFECTION SUGGESTS HUMAN CONTRACTION OF AVIAN FLU IS EXPANDING

Chinese health officials have confirmed the first case of H7N9 avian influenza contracted by a human near Hong Kong. Although there have been previous incidents of human infection in the Shanghai area of Eastern China, this latest incident reflects a significant geographic migration of several hundred miles southward for the disease.

According to China's Xinhua news agency, Secretary for Food and Health **Ko Wing-man** reported that a 36-year-old Indonesian domestic worker contracted the avian flu virus after coming into contact with poultry while traveling to Shenzhen, about 60 miles from Hong Kong. Close contacts of the victim have been hospitalized for observation and treatment, including four members of her immediate family who have shown signs of H7N9 infection.

To date the risk of avian flu migrating from infected humans to other humans has been downplayed by health and agriculture officials. The H7N9 strain was confirmed to have infected humans for the first time in March of 2013, when China's state media revealed that two people in Shanghai had died after being infected with the virus the previous month. Subsequent cases of human infection prompted Chinese officials to shut down meat markets and slaughter poultry in several mainland China cities amid fears of a potential epidemic. However, the UN's World Health Organization at the time reported there was no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus.

With the virus now apparently migrating southward in China, Hong Kong has moved to a heightened "alert" status. Officials report that plans are being prepared to inspect local chicken farms to make sure infection control measures are in place. Hong Kong officials also suspended the import of live poultry from three Shenzhen farms.

Chinese health officials documented 139 H7N9 infections in humans as of Nov. 6, 2013. There have been 45 deaths relating to avian flu infections since April of this year, according to data published by the U.N. World Health Organization.

The report of a human infection near Hong Kong comes one day after Chinese health officials launched plans for periodic temporary bans of live poultry trading over the next five years to stem avian flu transmission.