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# China Reports New Cases of Bird Flu

By **KEITH BRADSHER**

HONG KONG — Chinese and [World Health Organization](#) officials said Monday that they had still not yet found any human-to-human transmission of a [spreading form of avian influenza](#), after confirming five more infections among humans over the weekend and three more on Monday.

Public health officials around the world have been closely watching the emergence of the illness, H7N9 [influenza](#), in Shanghai and three nearby provinces in central-eastern [China](#) over the past week, and researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta have [begun work on a vaccine](#).

Chinese health officials have acknowledged 24 cases and 7 fatalities in the past week, counting the eight infections confirmed by laboratories over the last three days.

Liang Wannian, the director of the H7N9 influenza control and prevention office at the National Health and Family Planning Commission, said at a news conference in Beijing on Monday that the government was monitoring 621 people who had been in close contact with the infected patients and [had found no sign that any of them were getting sick](#).

“At present, the cases have been sporadic in nature, and no evidence of human-to-human transmission has been discovered,” Mr. Liang said, but he cautioned that “currently, due to the limited understanding of the origin and dissemination of this disease, there are still uncertainties remaining as regards the aspects of epidemic prevention and control work.”

Chinese officials are still investigating two families in which multiple cases of H7N9 are suspected, [according to the W.H.O.](#) One of the cases involves an 87-year-old man who died on March 4 and was later found to have had the disease. Two of his sons developed severe [pneumonia](#) about the same time, and one died on Feb. 28. But while severe pneumonia is rare, H7N9 has not been confirmed in either of the sons. And even if it had, the sons, as well as their father, could have been infected through animals instead of humans.

The Chinese authorities have not released details of the other family under investigation.

Mr. Liang said the Chinese government would be open about the outbreak’s progression, and the W.H.O. said it was in discussions about whether to send international experts to work with

China in halting the spread of H7N9.

Xinhua, the state-run news agency, said one of the 24 people who were infected, a 4-year-old boy in Shanghai, appeared to have recovered, although he remained in a hospital for observation. While the boy's improvement is a sign that the disease is not necessarily fatal, it also raises the question of whether more people are coming down with mild or even asymptomatic cases and recovering without becoming sick enough to visit a hospital or clinic for testing.

Because the virus can continue to mutate in people who are infected, scientists are eager to know whether H7N9 manifests itself only in cases that are serious enough to lead victims to seek medical attention. The W.H.O. lists 3 of the 24 cases as mild, although those patients were still in a hospital.

"The key point is whether there are milder cases — I'm not completely clear," said Dr. Malik Peiris, director of the [Center for Influenza Research at the University of Hong Kong](#).

Two of the eight main gene segments of the virus seem to come from wild birds, while the other six segments come from a well-known and widely distributed poultry virus, Dr. Peiris said. But the genes have changed to acquire patterns found in human influenza viruses, causing scientists to worry whether a further evolution of the virus could increase its ability to be transmitted.

[Dr. Ko Wing-man, Hong Kong's secretary for food and health](#), announced Monday that Hong Kong and mainland Chinese inspectors would begin extensive testing on Thursday of poultry being shipped to Hong Kong to determine whether any of the birds carry the disease. They will be released for sale only after they have been certified to be free from the disease, he said.