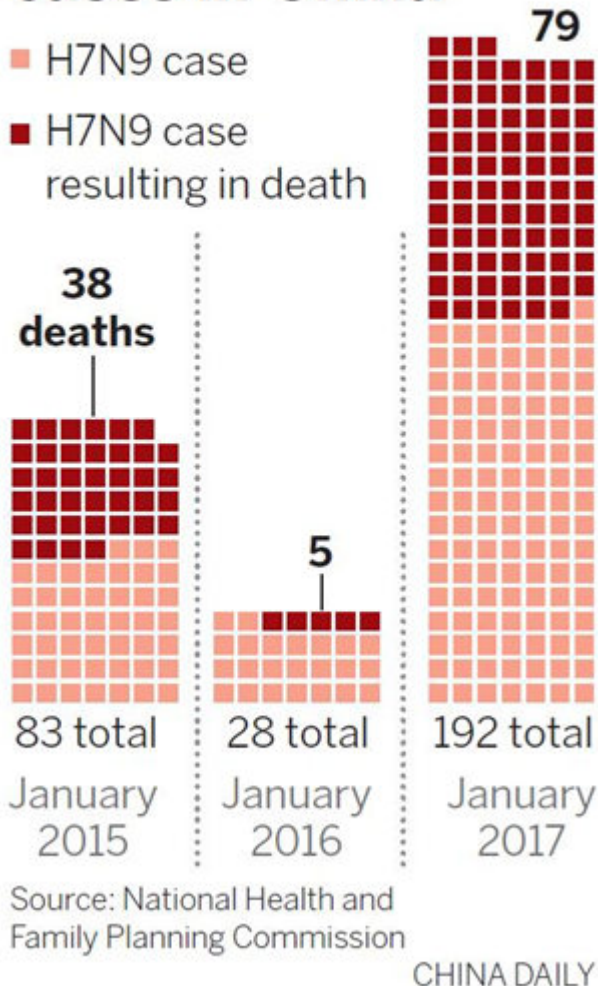


H7N9 bird flu season past its peak

Number of H7N9 cases in China



China's worst H7N9 bird flu season appears to have passed its peak but still is expected to last into late April, according to the latest information from epidemiologists.

Ni Daxin, deputy director of emergency response for the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said on Wednesday that the H7N9 epidemic appears to have been contained because fewer new cases are being reported daily.

"The peak of the epidemic seems to have passed, but smaller outbreaks may last into late April," he said at a news conference held by the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

He called for strengthening measures to control the virus, in particular shutting down additional live poultry markets.

In January alone, the Chinese mainland reported 192 human cases of H7N9, including 79 deaths, making it the worst season since the virus first appeared in the country in 2013, according to the commission.

The situation has rekindled public concern about potential viral mutations that could facilitate human-to-human transmission and an H7N9 pandemic.

Shu Yuelong, head of the Chinese National Influenza Center, said the virus has so far shown no mutations that would enable a sustained human spread.

However, he said that there have been four family clusters reported since September, and two may have involved human-to-human transmission via close contact.

Each of the two clusters involved two family members, with the first patient contracting the virus through exposure to live poultry in both cases, Shu said, without providing more details.

"These were highly individual, and all other patients were infected through contact with infected live poultry or wild birds," he stressed.

China has a national, real-time viral surveillance network and a joint epidemic control force involving several departments covering areas such as agriculture and commerce, according to a division director with the health commission who declined to be named.

"This collaboration is crucial to fighting viruses like H7N9, which can infect birds and humans," he said. Information exchanges helped agricultural authorities determine that H7N9 contamination is concentrated at live poultry markets, not at chicken farms.

In the hardest-hit regions, almost half of the remaining live poultry markets were found to have H7N9 contamination, he said.

During this H7N9 bird flu season, which started in October, the virus had infected 306 people and by the end of January had killed 100 in 16 provinces, including Guangdong, Jiangsu and Anhui.

Most cases happened in the south and on the eastern seaboard, Ni said, adding that the main reasons were weather conditions and "the local habits of buying live or freshly slaughtered chickens".

In response, regions have shut down live poultry trading and markets as part of effort to contain the outbreak.

But that is only a short-term, emergency measure, Ni said. "The ultimate way out is to upgrade the industry, shifting to large-scale poultry farming and slaughtering."

The closing of live poultry markets has proved effective in slowing the spread of the virus, he said, adding that the public can also help by avoiding live poultry markets or handling live poultry or their droppings.

"If the public buys only frozen poultry, control of the epidemic will be much easier. The nutritional value is equal to that of freshly slaughtered poultry, but it involves far fewer health risks," Ni added.

Beijing to invest US\$40 billion in key projects in 2017

The city of Beijing plans to invest 274.4 billion yuan (about US\$40 billion) in a total of 230 key projects in 2017, an increase of 20 projects from the year earlier.

The fixed-asset investment of the municipal government will reach 55 billion yuan in 2017, a year-on-year increase of 6.5 percent. Apart from the government, other kinds of investment will also be used, including PPP (public-privatization partnership), capital investment and investment in funds.

A total of 274.4 billion yuan will be invested in 230 key projects in 2017, which will contribute more than 30 percent of the overall investment. Investment will focus on basic education, the aged care, renovation of the city's shantytown, air pollution, traffic congestion, water quality, garbage disposal and other areas that the public is most concerned.

Beijing's transportation will involve 19 key projects, the shantytown renovation projects 11 projects, the public service 14 projects. And the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region will carry out 62 projects. Beijing also plans to invest 38.4 billion yuan in 61 infrastructure projects this year, including the first phase of the new airport line and other 21 rail transit projects.

Poisonous gas may have driven prehistoric extinction

Chinese scientists have developed a hypothesis that poisonous gas from the deep ocean may have driven one of the severest mass extinctions on the planet.

Sulfureted hydrogen in the depths of the sea may have contributed to the end-Permian extinction that wiped out more than 80 percent of marine life about 250 million years ago, according to the University of Science and Technology of China.

Scientists have posited many hypotheses explaining the mass extinction, including a possible celestial impact and volcano activity.

Through the study of samples of deep-sea sediment, the Chinese team believe they have found evidence indicating the presence of rich sulfureted hydrogen, a poisonous gas, said Shen Yan'an, head of the research.

The interaction between the gas in the deep water with oxygen-rich water on the surface is a deadly mixture, Shen said.

"Today, sulfureted hydrogen exists in some waters in Gulf of Mexico, California and India", said Shen, adding that the findings could also give insight into climate and environmental changes and inform policies.

The findings have been published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

[Fake cosmetics worth over 800 mln yuan seized in China](#)

Fifteen suspects have been arrested in east China's Zhejiang Province for producing and selling fake and substandard cosmetics, Zhejiang Police said Wednesday.

Police in Taizhou City dismantled seven underground dens during a raid earlier this month and seized over 1,200 boxes of counterfeit cosmetic products and commodities labeled as high-end brands such as Chanel, Lancome, Dior and Estee Lauder.

The goods had a street value of over 827 million yuan (120 million U.S. dollars) at market prices.

A total of 15 suspects were detained, of which 13 have been charged by procurators.

The case surfaced in February last year after a complaint about an Amway-branded toothpaste bought online that was found to be fake.

Investigation into the online store shone a light on a chain that manufacture and distribute counterfeit top brand cosmetics in Henan, Heilongjiang, Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces.

China's Yunnan reports another H7N9 fatality

Southwest China's Yunnan Province has reported another death from the H7N9 strain of bird flu.

The female patient, 23, was mother of the three-year old infant girl who died of H7N9 earlier this month, according to the Health and Family Planning Commission of Yunnan Province Wednesday.

The family of three went to east China's Jiangxi Province for the Spring Festival holiday on Jan. 21, and had contact with live poultry there.

The patient, who has only been identified by her surname Yang, developed symptoms on Feb. 4. She was hospitalized four days later as she had close contact with her daughter, who tested positive for H7N9 virus and died on Feb. 7.

Her condition deteriorated rapidly and she died in hospital Tuesday night.

Other people who had been in close contact have all tested negative for the virus so far.

H7N9 bird flu has been reported in several provinces in China so far this year, with 79 people died in January from the virus nationwide, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

The live poultry trade has been suspended in cities across the provinces of Sichuan, Hunan and Zhejiang.

H7N9 is a bird flu strain first reported to have infected humans in China in March 2013. Infections usually occur in winter and spring.