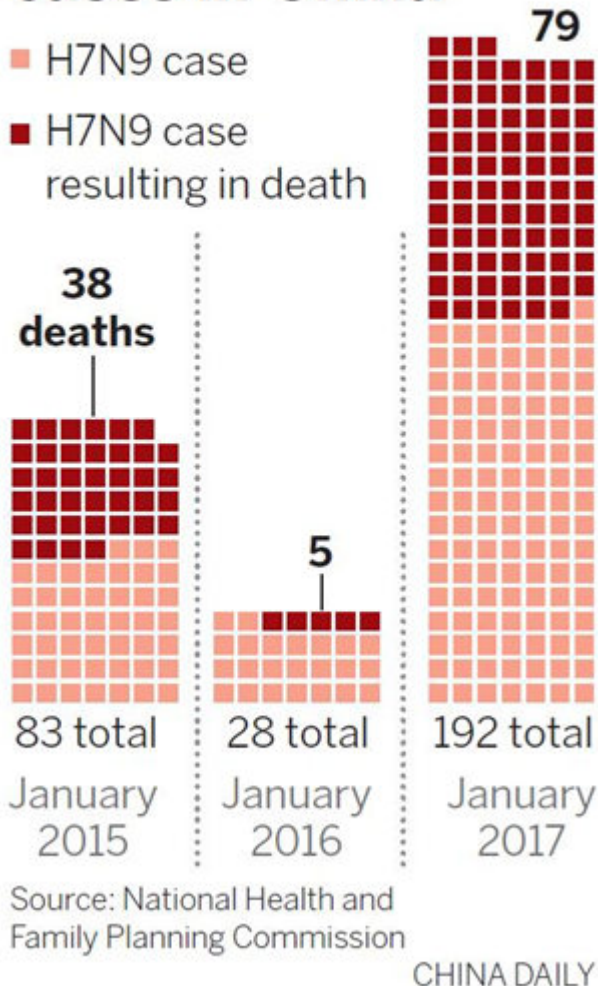


H7N9 bird flu season past its peak

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.

News story: Government delivers £40 million to tackle child sexual abuse and child trafficking

The Home Secretary has today (16 February) announced the delivery of a £40 million package of government measures to protect children and young people from sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking, and to crack down on offenders.

It includes the launch of a new Centre of Expertise on child sexual abuse, an

extra £20 million for the National Crime Agency to tackle online child sexual exploitation, £2.2 million for organisations working to protect children at risk of trafficking and the launch of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTAs) in 3 early-adopter sites across the UK.

Amber Rudd announced the measures after visiting Safer Futures in Salford, Greater Manchester, a counselling centre for victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse. The counselling centre is run by Barnardo's, which heads the Centre of Expertise and delivers the ICTA service.

Writing for Mumsnet, Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

Children should be able to grow up free from the horrors of sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Something that should go without saying, but sadly that's not the case.

This government has done more than any other to tackle these horrific offences. We have increased support for victims of sexual abuse, invested in training and technology to improve law enforcement's response to abuse both on and offline, and brought in a tougher inspection regime to ensure all front-line professions are meeting their child protection duties.

But there is more to do, the measures I am announcing today will further improve our ability to protect children, and under my watch I am determined to bring those that would try to steal their childhood to justice.

The Centre of Expertise, a consortium of health, law enforcement and social care professionals, charities and academics, will receive £7.5 million until 2020. It will become the definitive source of information and guidance to those tackling child sexual abuse and exploitation on the front line.

The Home Office's child trafficking protection fund will today award nearly £2.2 million to seven charities for projects protecting vulnerable children in the UK and overseas who are at risk of trafficking. The projects cover a range of proposals including tailored support for trafficking victims from various cultures, developing skills and expertise in local areas, and a specialist accommodation pilot.

Independent child trafficking advocates will provide specialist support and act in the best interests of trafficked children. The service will initially be provided by Barnardo's in Wales, Hampshire and Greater Manchester ahead of full national roll out.

Barnardo's Chief Executive, Javed Khan, said:

Through the Centre of Expertise we will develop a deeper

understanding of this abuse so that more children can be protected and helped to recover. We will use our collective experience and expertise to develop a greater understanding of what works in the fight against child sexual abuse and to improve responses.

And thanks to the roll-out of the independent child trafficking advocates, trafficked children in Hampshire, Greater Manchester and Wales will no longer have to navigate their way alone through complicated statutory systems including health, social care, education and criminal justice, to get the support they need.

Will Kerr, Director of the National Crime Agency's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) command said:

Using the previous government funding we have been able to nearly double the number of dedicated officers working to tackle CSE to more than 300, opened a new hub in the north west to specifically undertake CSE operations and more than tripled the overall organisational effort against CSE.

The additional funding will strengthen and enhance our victim identification and child protection adviser capabilities, to target the most serious child sexual exploitation offenders.

Other measures announced today include:

- £2.2 million for the second phase of the successful Disrespect NoBody campaign, which is designed to increase awareness of healthy relationships among young people
- a revised definition of child sexual exploitation, to ensure frontline professionals have a shared understanding of what CSE is and how best to tackle it
- an additional £7 million for organisations helping victims of sexual abuse, including children, doubling (for the third year) the core funding from central government for sexual abuse services
- on 13 February the government launched the second phase of its 'together, we can tackle child abuse' campaign, which is designed to educate people about what to do if they have any concerns about a child

The announcement comes as the government publishes its [tackling child sexual exploitation: progress report](#), detailing the steps taken so far and what more needs to be done to combat this terrible crime. It follows the 2015 [tackling child sexual exploitation report](#) which set out an ambitious programme of work to address on a national scale the failures to protect children and young people seen in Rotherham and elsewhere.

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.