6 In Indonesian Family Die of Bird Flu

GENEVA -- An Indonesian family infected with bird flu may have passed the disease among themselves rather than individually catching it from poultry, but the World Health Organization is leaving its pandemic alert level unchanged, the agency said Wednesday.

Six of seven people in the extended family in northern Sumatra who caught the disease have died, the most recent on Monday. An eighth person who died was buried before tests could be conducted, but she was considered to be among those infected with the H5N1 strain of bird flu.

WHO is investigating whether the strain was spread among family members, although it said Wednesday there was no evidence the virus had mutated to a form that will spread more easily between humans, possibly sparking a pandemic.

"We haven't seen evidence from Indonesia that the disease is passing easily from human to human," WHO spokeswoman Maria Cheng told The Associated Press.

The agency's alert level remained at 3, where it has been for months. That means there is "no or very limited human-to-human transmission."

Cheng said it was unlikely the agency would raise the alert level in the immediate future.

"All confirmed cases in the cluster can be directly linked to close and prolonged exposure to a patient during a phase of severe illness," a WHO statement said. "Although human-to-human transmission cannot be ruled out, the search for a possible alternative source of exposure is continuing."

She said WHO had considered convening a meeting of experts to debate whether to raise the alert level, but had decided that the current situation did not merit that step.

"We had discussed that," she said. "But that is not going to happen."

The agency has suspected that in rare cases bird flu may have passed from one person to another, but it usually has been caught by people from chickens and other poultry.

WHO said that testing indicated there had been no significant mutations in the virus. Experts have feared that a mutation of the virus into a strain that could easily pass among humans could set off a deadly flu pandemic.

According to the WHO, 218 people have been confirmed to have been infected with bird flu since 2003, and 124 of them have died.

The agency said the Indonesian Health Ministry had confirmed a man who died May 22 had been infected with the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu.

He was the seventh member of an extended family confirmed to have become infected. An eighth person in the family, who died of similar symptoms May 4, was buried before tissue samples could be taken, so the cause of death could not be determined, but she is assumed to be part of the cluster, WHO said.

The family lives in the Kubu Sembelang village, Karo District, of North Sumatra.

"The newly confirmed case is a brother of the initial case," WHO said. "Specimens were taken on 21 May and flown the same day to Jakarta. Tests run overnight confirmed his infection. His 10-year-old son died of H5N1 infection on 13 May. The father was closely involved in caring for his son, and this contact is considered a possible source of infection."

It said the investigation is continuing, but that preliminary findings indicate that three of the confirmed cases spent the night of April 29 in a small room with the first woman infected and that

she was coughing frequently.

That group included the woman's two sons and a second brother, who is the sole surviving case among infected members of this family, WHO said. Other infected family members lived in adjacent homes.

So far health workers have found no sign that the case has moved outside the family and there is also "no evidence that efficient human-to-human transmission has occurred."

Laboratory testing has completed full genetic sequencing of two viruses isolated from cases in this cluster. That has found "no evidence of genetic reassortment with human or pig influenza viruses and no evidence of significant mutations," WHO said.

Such a change could have been dangerous, because it might combine the bird flu virus with a strain that would make it easily pass among humans.

*Associated Press correspondent Alexander G. Higgins contributed to this report.

It's National Dog Bite Prevention Week

The American Veterinary Medical Association, the United States Postal Service and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have joined forces to again sponsor National Dog Bite Prevention Week, May 21-27.

Approximately 4.7 million people are bitten by dogs each year, with 800,000 individuals — half of them children — requiring medical treatment. In fact, half of all children in the US experience a dog bite by age 12, with 5 to 9 year olds and boys at significantly higher risk. The CDC reports that of those injured, 386,000 require treatment in an emergency department and about a dozen die.

Most bites result from inappropriate interaction with the family pet or with a neighbor's or a friend's dog. Most of these injuries can be prevented with responsible pet ownership and learning how to behave safely around your own or unknown dogs.

The AVMA has developed an informative brochure that you may wish to make available to your clients. The brochure can be seen at http://www.avma.org/communications/brochures/dog_bite/dog_bite_brochure.asp.

We Need Your Help Filling Out the DOR Audit Survey!

It is VITAL that we start compiling information to demonstrate the impact of the DOR audit practices. If you have been audited (or have been notified of the DOR's intention to conduct an audit during the past five years) please fill out the ISVMA Audit Survey.

If you know other practices that have been audited or have been notified of the DOR's intent to audit, please ask them to complete this survey, as well. We need a comprehensive picture of the impact on veterinary practices to continue building pressure on the legislature to deal with this issue.

If you need more information, please contact Peter Weber, ISVMA Executive Director at (217) 523-8387.

Central Illinois VMA Meeting

The Central Illinois VMA will host a Spring Dinner Meeting on Wednesday, June 7, 2006 at the Pasta House in Springfield. The meeting will begin with a social gathering at 6:00 p.m. and dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. The evening speaker will be Dr. Julie Byron, Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine. Dr. Byron will be speaking on feline urinary tract disease.

The CIVMA Spring Meeting is an informal dinner gathering for all CIVMA members or anyone interested in joining. If you wish to register, you may obtain a registration form by contacting Dr. Sean Snyder at (217) 546-9020.

Membership Renewal

You should have received your ISVMA Membership Renewal Packet in the mail already. If you have not, please contact ISVMA and ask for another copy.

If you have changed practices in the last year without notifying us, your renewal packet may have been sent to your former employer. Call ISVMA to update your membership records and we'll be happy to send a new packet to you.

Remember, the renewal process works differently now. If you fail to renew by June 30, 2006 your membership will be suspended in 30 days and remain suspended until payment is made. If you fail to pay before June 30, 2007, your membership will then be terminated. While your membership is suspended, you will not be able to enjoy the many programs, services and benefits of membership in your state veterinary association. We look forward to having 100% renewal before the deadline!

If you need more information, please contact ISVMA at (217) 523-8387.

Has Your Veterinary Staff Changed in the Past Year?

Did you experience a change in staff since July 1, 2005? If so, did you remember to contact ISVMA to update your practice staff listings? If you have had a change in staff, please contact ISVMA to let us know!

Will You Be Hiring a 2006 Graduate Veterinarian?

If you are hiring a 2006 graduate veterinarian, their membership in ISVMA is free for the first year! Please encourage them to fill out an online membership application. The recent graduate does not need to be licensed to join ISVMA. They do have to be a graduate of an AVMA accredited veterinary college. We will track their license status and update our records upon completion of the license application.

Remember, if you hire a recent graduate they cannot engage in the practice of veterinary medicine until they have their obtained their Illinois license. Unlicensed veterinarians may only engage in activities more commonly associated with veterinary assistants (not technicians).

The Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation has increased their staff and budget to more quickly process professional license applications. We are optimistic that the long delays between application and licensure will be mitigated.

If we can be of assistance or help clarify the role of your recent graduate hire, please contact ISVMA at (217) 523-8387.

ISVMA Annual Convention

Remember to mark your calendar for the ISVMA 124th Annual Convention on November 3-5, 2006 at the Wyndham Chicago Northwest Hotel in Itasca, IL.

Our convention continues to establish new standards of excellence. The convention planning committee has put together a program that will blow you away! You will be amazed at the speaker lineup, the quality topics, expanded wetlabs and more. Look for more information from ISVMA in the coming weeks.

About the Photo in This Issue...

Adult Red-headed Woodpeckers (Melanerpes erythrocephalus) are unique and unmistakable, with a red head, neck and throat, black tail, black wings with large white patches at the secondaries, along with a white rump and underparts. Juveniles look similar but have streaked dusky brown backs, wings, and tails; streaked dusky brown heads; and some barring in the white wing patch. This plumage lasts through the summer and into the fall. The molt into the adult plumage begins in September with the head and back beginning to show adult coloring and lasts through the winter.

Red-headed Woodpeckers range from southern Canada to the Gulf Coast, east of the Rocky Mountains and west of New England. They are birds of wooded savanna, open woodlands, riparian forests, orchards, suburbia, and agricultural lands. Preferred habitat includes dead trees for use as nest sites, relatively open undergrowth, and access to the ground for foraging. In the East, old mature woodlots with some undergrowth as well as suburbs and agricultural areas are typical redhead habitats, whereas in the South, clearings with tall stumps are used. Although uncommon throughout much of their range, Red-headed Woodpeckers are most abundant in the open forests of the Midwest. They were once common throughout much of the Northeast but declined with competition from European Starlings for nest sites.

Unlike other woodpeckers, Red-headed Woodpeckers rarely excavate holes to find insects. Instead, they employ a wide variety of foraging techniques and eat a wide variety of foods. They will often sally out from a perch after flying insects in the manner of flycatchers, or they will drop to the ground to capture prey they spotted while perched. Animal prey ranges from beetles, ants, and grasshoppers to mice, eggs, and young birds. Red-headed Woodpeckers have been known to expand the openings of hole-nesting birds' nest sites to get at the nestlings. Over the course of a year, about half of their diet consists of vegetable food. Their fondness for cultivated fruit and corn may make them a nuisance in some areas. Winter staples of acorns and beechnuts are gathered and stored in crevices, cracks, and other naturally occurring holes. Unlike their food-caching relative, the Acorn Woodpecker (*M. formicivorus*), they do not make their own holes for storing food. In some cases, they seal their caches with chips of wood or twigs. Large insects such as grasshoppers and June beetles may also be stored for short periods of time.

Males excavate nest cavities in barkless, dead tree trunks or limbs from 6 feet to 75 feet above ground. The task takes about two weeks. In treeless regions, fence posts and utility poles are used, as well as more unusual sites such as old wagon wheels, pumps, and buildings. Both sexes share in the incubation and feeding, although the females increasingly assume the workload as the nestlings grow older. Males sometimes begin another excavation for a second brood.

Cool fact: The migration of Red-headed Woodpeckers appears to depend on the availability of winter foods, especially acorns and beech nuts. During most years, birds from the northern parts of the breeding range move southward in winter. They are somewhat gregarious outside of the

breeding season, and large flocks, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, may be seen in passage.

I photographed this adult Red-headed Woodpecker near Loami, Illinois last weekend.

Contact Us

Please feel free to forward this issue of the E-SOURCE to veterinarians that are not receiving ISVMA's electronic newsletter. Any ISVMA member may subscribe to the E-SOURCE for free:

If you wish to add your name to the recipient list, send an e-mail toinfo@isvma.org and ask to receive the E-SOURCE newsletter.

ISVMA values your membership and does not want to send you any unwanted email. If you would like to be removed from this member service, please emailinfo@isvma.org.