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ASIA EDITION

Now, Vietnam on H7N9 bird flu red alert

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Singapore: A new finding revealed from a mapping study conducted by researchers has predicted that Avian Influenza H7N9 will spread into Guangxi province. The study published in the Journal of Infection has also has flagged northern Vietnam as the next high-risk area.

The Chinese researchers, along with their US collaborators conducted the mapping study and plotted the locations of H7N9 cases and negative cases from China's flulike illness surveillance. Researchers have identified H7N9 risk factors with logistic regression, and used geographic information systems (GIS) to make maps that predicted H7N9 risk across Asia.

The same method using H7N9 cases reported in the spring wave of cases last year predicted that the virus would spread to Guangxi province, an area that borders northern Vietnam, in February 2014. In late January and early February, three human cases were reported from the province, including one involving a 5-year-old boy who got sick after an H7N9 infection was detected in his 41-year-old mother. The province's other patient is a 56-year-old woman who in late January was reported as its first case-patient.

Researchers noted that even though the map was constructed using cases reported during the spring wave, it was able to predict patterns during the second wave.

The report said that the model has predicted a high risk of H7N9 infections in humans in northern Vietnam. The team noted that Guangdong province, a hot spot for human and poultry infections, is within 200 kilometers (125 miles) of the Vietnamese border.

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The findings add support to the need for increased surveillance in northern Vietnam for human illnesses and positive samples from live-poultry market, the team said. They added that each day northern Vietnam's Quang Ninh and Lang Son provinces

import 100 tons of hens from China that are past their egg-laying peak and are sold for meat.

Other possible sites in Southeast Asia flagged by the model include northern Laos and eastern Myanmar, but the researchers noted that those nations aren't known to import chickens from areas of China in which H7N9 has been reported.

While the unofficial number of deaths in China has been put at 120 by news reports, the two infections edge the outbreak's overall total to 394, according to a human case list compiled by FluTrackers.

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