

China bird-flu research raises questions

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A new China study predates the country's claim of its first human bird-flu case by two years, raising questions about the spread of the disease, a report says.

The new findings were outlined by eight Chinese scientists in a letter to the New England Journal of Medicine, the Wall Street Journal said. The letter said a 24-year-old man who died in late 2003 was a victim of a particular strain of the bird flu and not of SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome, as earlier believed.

Prior to this, the Journal said, China had claimed it discovered its first human case late last year. The report said international health officials have long suspected the actual death toll from bird flu in China might be higher than claimed.

The Journal said one of scientists had sought to withdraw the letter, but a spokesman for the medical publication told the newspaper, "We returned {the e-mails} with a message from the editors telling them that it was too late to withdraw since the issue had already been printed. We asked them for an explanation, and we asked them if they would like to retract the letter. We have not yet received a response."

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