

Cambodian girl dies from bird flu

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An eleven-year-old girl in Cambodia has died from bird flu, the country's first fatality from the virus in years, health authorities said.

The World Health Organization has called for vigilance after the recent detection of bird flu in mammals, but has stressed that the risk to humans is low.

The girl fell ill on February 16 with a fever, cough and sore throat, and later died in hospital, Cambodia's Communicable Disease Control Department said Wednesday.

It did not specify the time of death, but said that test results delivered on Wednesday confirmed that the girl—who was from eastern Prey Veng province—was "positive for H5N1", referring to the bird flu virus.

The disease typically spreads from birds to humans through direct contact.

Officials were waiting for test results from several dead birds found near the girl's village, Cambodia's health ministry said.

In a statement, health minister Mam Bunheng urged parents to keep their children away from poultry as well as sick or dead birds.

The case is the 57th recorded instance of bird flu since the virus hit Cambodia two decades ago.

Since late 2021, Europe has been gripped by its worst-ever outbreak of bird flu, with North and South America also experiencing severe outbreaks.

This has led to the culling of tens of millions of domestic poultry worldwide, many with the H5N1 strain.

The global outbreak is also responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of wild birds.

The recent detection of the disease in a number of mammals, including foxes, otters, minks, sea lions and even grizzly bears, has sparked concern that humans could be more at risk.

"The recent spillover to mammals needs to be monitored closely," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said this month, stressing that "for the moment, WHO assesses the risk to humans as low".

Globally, there have been more than 450 fatal bird flu cases since 2003, according to the WHO.

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