Bird flu claims fifth victim this year in Indonesia

March 7 2012

A 24-year-old woman has died of bird flu on Indonesia's Sumatra island, the fifth human death from the virus this year, a health ministry official said Wednesday.

"She tested positive for the H5N1 virus by the health ministry's laboratory. It's the fifth death here this year," the ministry's head of animal-borne infectious diseases, Rita Kusriastuti, told AFP.

Concerns about avian influenza have risen in Asia since China in late December reported its first fatality from the H5N1 virus in 18 months. Since then one more person has died in China, according to the health ministry.

Indonesia has been the nation hardest-hit by bird flu, with 150 deaths reported between 2003 and 2011, according to the World Health Organization. Nine Indonesians died from the virus last year.

"The woman was living in an area where there are many ducks and chickens. She also had some (poultry) in her house," Kusriastuti said, adding that she died on March 1 in a hospital in Bengkulu city.

The virus typically spreads from birds to humans through direct contact, but experts fear it could mutate into a form that is easily transmissible between humans, with the potential to kill millions in a pandemic.

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