

Overseas briefs

Source: World Health Organization (WHO)

New influenza virus strain, Hong Kong

A type A influenza virus (H₅N₁) known previously only to infect birds has been isolated from a 3 year-old boy in Hong Kong. The child died of Reye's syndrome last May following an acute respiratory illness. This is the only human case to have been detected so far. "There is no indication at present that this strain has spread from person to person. There is consequently no need for special measures to be taken, as of today," confirmed Dr Daniel Lavanchy of the WHO's Division of Emerging and other Communicable Diseases Surveillance and Control (EMC). The WHO is monitoring developments, working in close collaboration with the Influenza Centre and the Department of Health in Hong Kong, and the four WHO Collaborating Centres for Reference and Research on Influenza. Although no more instances of type A(H₅N₁) virus have been reported in

humans, efforts are being made to determine whether other persons in Hong Kong, or other parts of southern China have been infected with this strain. A team of scientists from the WHO Collaborating Centre in the United States of America arrived in Hong Kong on 20 August. They are to conduct an extensive investigation with the WHO Collaborating Centre from the National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Japan, and the Influenza Centre and Department of Health in Hong Kong, to assess the significance of this discovery and its impact on public health.

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