China City Closes Poultry Markets to Combat Bird Flu

BEIJING (AP) — The major city of Guangzhou in southern China closed its live poultry markets on Saturday for two weeks to halt the spread of the H7N9 strain of bird flu [1].

The closure lasts through Feb. 28 "to strengthen work to control the spread of the H7N9 flu," the city government said in a one-sentence announcement on its microblog account.

Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong province, one of the hardest-hit areas in China's latest bird flu outbreak [2]. Some 65 cases and 13 deaths have been reported by the provincial health bureau. The latest was a 78-year-old man who died Feb. 14 in Guangzhou.

The virus is hard to catch and most cases have been linked to contact with poultry.

Nationwide, there have been at least 32 deaths, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. The health ministry said 127 cases were reported nationwide in January.

One market in Guangzhou, Jiangcun, is one of China's busiest, with more than 60,000 birds per day sold there last year, according to Xinhua.

The market closures add to disease-control measures that have included the mass slaughter of chickens and other poultry on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong.

Shanghai in China's east imposed a three-month moratorium on live poultry sales in January. Zhejiang province south of Shanghai has suspended poultry trading. Also in January, Hong Kong suspended sales of live poultry and imports from the mainland.

The World Health Organization says there is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission but has recommended close monitoring due to the unpredictable behavior of flu viruses.

In January, authorities confirmed a second human case of H10N8, a separate bird flu strain known to affect humans. In the first case, a 73-year-old woman died in December.

Chinese live poultry suppliers are losing more than 1 billion yuan ($150 million) per month, Xinhua said, citing Chen Yingfeng, president of the Guangdong Poultry Industry Association.

During China's last bird flu outbreak in April 2012, producers lost 70 billion yuan

($11 billion), Cheng was quoted as saying.

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