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A little reassurance after the alarm that was being spread yesterday, but still something we should all be keeping an eye on. (copied across from Reuters statement released 2hrs ago) I have to keep reminding concerned family and friends that the number of human deaths from this over the last 3 years is an average of around forty each year WORLDWIDE – more than that have died shaving! Not trying to be flippant just trying to hold on to a balanced perspective and the fact that it is its 'potential' to mutate that is so terrifying. Something that has not and may never happen. There was an excellent article about A.I, its history and re-emergence in the New Scientist a few weeks back, also highlighting the danger to wild cats who are now being impacted upon through consumption of infected birds. Well worth looking up for those who want a clear, easy-to-follow summary of this topic, including cluster maps of world occurrences.

Rosie

JAKARTA (Reuters) – Limited human-to-human transmission of bird flu might have occurred in an Indonesian family but there is no evidence the virus has mutated to allow it to pass easily among people, the World Health Organization said.

Fears of human-to-human transmission pushed down European shares and boosted demand for safe-haven bonds on Wednesday, lifting benchmark Bund futures to their highest in more than six weeks. The dollar rose against the yen. Concern has been growing about the case in north Sumatra in which seven family members from a village died this month. The case is the largest family cluster known to date, the WHO has said.

The WHO and Indonesian health officials are baffled over the source of the infection but genetic sequencing has shown the H5N1 bird flu virus has not mutated, the UN agency said on its Web site (<http://www.who.int>) on Tuesday. Nor was there any sign of the virus spreading among other villagers.

"To date, the investigation has found no evidence of spread within the general community and no evidence that efficient human-to-human transmission

has occurred, the WHO said.

"Sequencing of all eight gene segments found no evidence of genetic reassortment with human or pig influenza viruses and no evidence of significant mutations," the WHO statement read.

"The human viruses from this cluster are genetically similar to viruses isolated from poultry in North Sumatra during a previous outbreak."

Sick poultry have been the source of bird flu infections for the vast majority of human cases worldwide. The virus can also infect pigs.

Clusters are looked on with far more suspicion than isolated infections because they raise the possibility the virus might have mutated to transmit efficiently among humans.

That could spark a pandemic, killing millions of people.

Financial markets have become worried after the WHO said one of the family members, a 32-year-old father, died on Monday after caring for his ailing son, who also died.

The agency said such close contact was considered a possible source of infection.

WORRYING

"This is the most significant development so far in terms of public health," Peter Cordingley, spokesman for the West Pacific region of the WHO, told Reuters Television in the Philippine capital on Wednesday.

"We have never had a cluster as large as this. We have not had in the past what we have here, which is no explanation as to how these people became infected."

"We can't find sick animals in this community and that worries us," he added.

Bird flu has killed 124 people in ten countries since it re-emerged in Asia in 2003. It remains essentially a disease in birds and has spread to dozens of countries in wild birds and poultry.

Limited transmissions between people — the result of very close and prolonged contact when the sick person is coughing and probably infectious — are very likely to have occurred before in Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia.

Close contact also occurred in the Sumatran family, the WHO said, giving its first details of the case.

So far, investigators know that a woman, known as the initial case, appeared

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to have been the first to become ill at the end of April. She died in early May and was buried before samples could be taken from her body.

"Preliminary findings indicate that three of the confirmed cases spent the night of 29 April in a small room together with the initial case at a time when she was symptomatic and coughing frequently," the WHO Web statement on Tuesday reads.

"All confirmed cases in the cluster can be directly linked to close and prolonged exposure to a patient during a phase of severe illness. Although human-to-human transmission cannot be ruled out, the search for a possible alternative source of exposure is continuing," the WHO said.

Markets are also nervous about a suspected family cluster in Iran.

An Iranian medical official told Reuters on Monday that a 41-year-old man and his 26-year-old sister from the northwestern city of Kermanshah had tested positive for bird flu.

But Health Minister Kamran Lankarani denied this although international health officials are still investigating.

The two siblings were among five members of a family who became sick and the other three remain in the hospital.

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