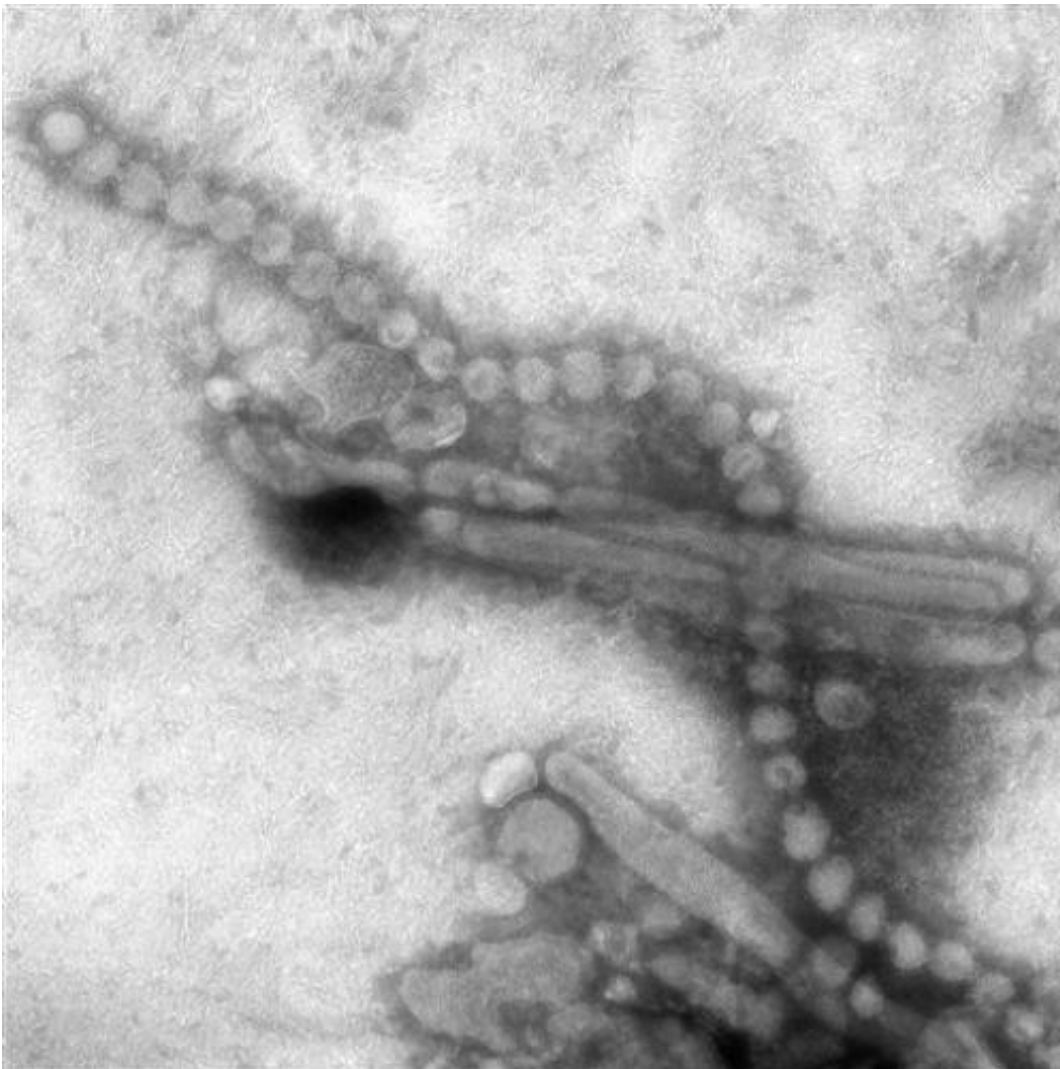


## WHO says new H7N9 flu passes more easily from bird to human

April 24 2013, by Gillian Wong

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This Monday, April 15, 2013 electron microscope image provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows the H7N9 virus which can take on a variety of shapes. Almost three weeks after China reported finding a new strain of bird flu in humans, experts are still stumped by how people are

becoming infected when many appear to have had no recent contact with live fowl and the virus isn't supposed to pass from person to person. Understanding how the H7N9 bird flu virus is spreading is a goal of international and Chinese experts assembled by the World Health Organization as they begin a weeklong investigation Friday, April 18, 2013. (AP Photo/CDC, C.S. Goldsmith, T. Rowe)

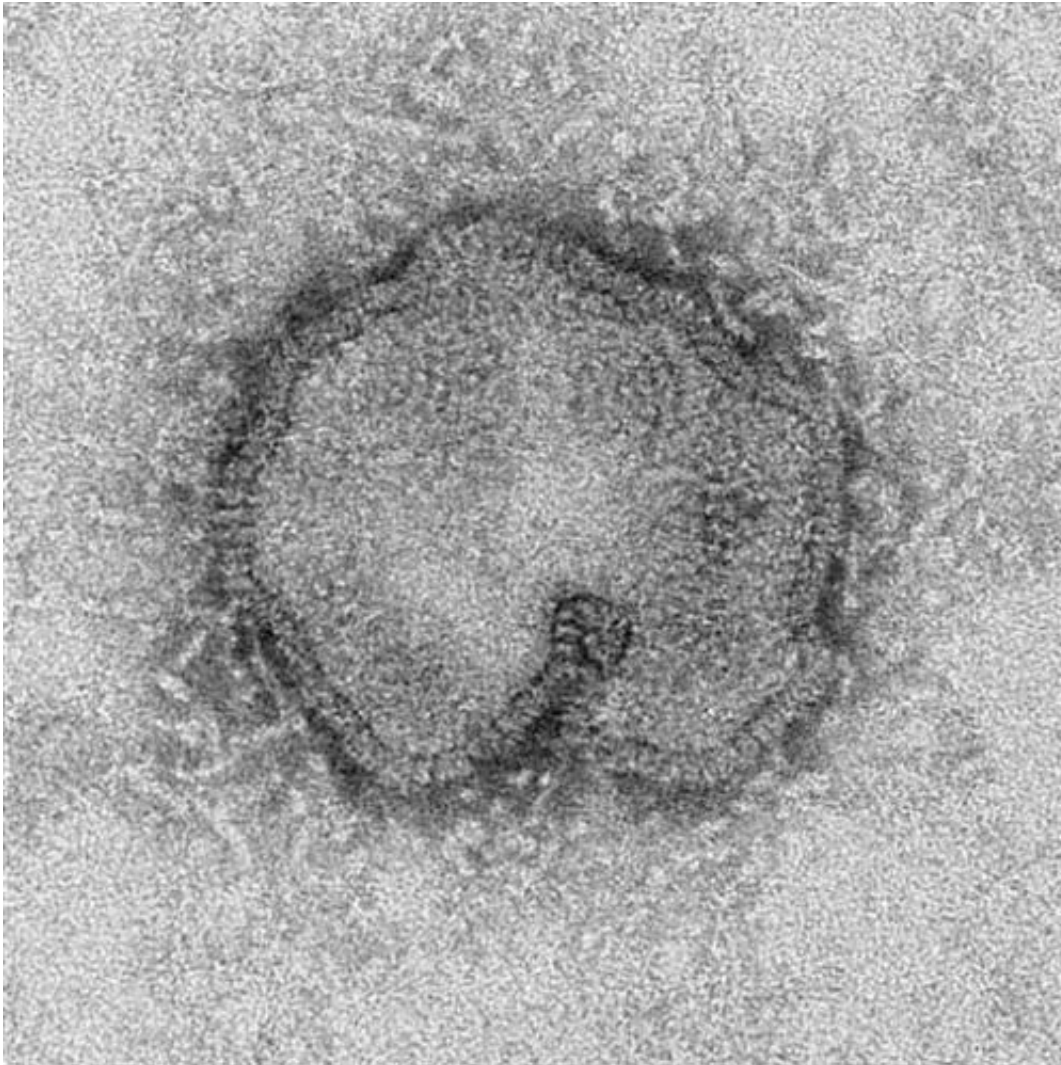
A new strain of bird flu that emerged in China over the past month is one of the "most lethal" flu viruses so far, worrying health officials because it can jump more easily from birds to humans than the one that started killing people a decade ago, World Health Organization officials said Wednesday.

Scientists are watching the virus closely to see if it could spark a global pandemic but say there is little evidence so far that it can spread easily from human to human.

WHO's top influenza expert, Dr. Keiji Fukuda, told reporters at a briefing in Beijing that people seem to catch the H7N9 virus from birds more easily than the H5N1 strain that began ravaging poultry across Asia in 2003. The H5N1 strain has since killed 360 people worldwide, mostly after contact with infected fowl.

Health experts are concerned about H7N9's ability to jump to humans, and about the strain's capacity to infect birds without causing noticeable symptoms, which makes it difficult to monitor its spread.

"This is definitely one of the most lethal influenza viruses we have seen so far," Fukuda said. But he added that experts are still trying to understand the virus, and that there might be a large number of mild infections that are going undetected.



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The H7N9 bird flu virus has infected more than 100 people in China, seriously sickening most of them and killing more than 20, mostly near the eastern coast around Shanghai. Taiwan on Wednesday confirmed its first case, a 53-year-old man who became sick after returning from a visit to the eastern Chinese province of Kiangsu.

In comparison, the earlier bird flu strain, H5N1, is known to kill up to 60 of every 100 people it infects.

Wednesday's briefing came at the end of a weeklong joint investigation by WHO and Chinese authorities in Beijing and Shanghai.

Experts said they still aren't sure how people are getting infected but said evidence points to infections at live poultry markets, particularly through ducks and chickens. They said it was encouraging that reported infections appeared to slow down after the closure of live poultry markets in affected areas.

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