

## BIRD FLU



### Issue

Bird flu has been reported among wild geese in Himachal Pradesh, crows in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and ducks in Kerala.

### Background

In Himachal Pradesh's Pong Dam Lake, around 1,800 migratory birds have been found dead. In Kerala, the flu has been detected in ducks of two districts.

### Details

- Bird Flu or Avian influenza is a highly contagious viral disease caused by Influenza Type A viruses which generally affects poultry birds such as chickens and turkeys.
- There are many strains of the virus – some of them are mild and may merely cause a low egg production or other mild symptoms among chickens, while others are severe and lethal.
- Wild aquatic birds such as ducks and geese are the natural reservoir of Influenza A viruses and the central players in the ecology of these viruses. Many birds carry the flu without developing sickness, and shed it in their droppings.
- Through migrating water birds, the viruses are further spread to poultry and terrestrial birds. Sometimes, the virus jumps over to mammals such as pigs, horses, cats and dogs.

### Human infection

- In 1997, humans were first known to have contracted bird flu following an outbreak in a live bird market of Hong Kong. It was the H5N1 strain of the virus.
- Movement of infected poultry and migratory birds, and an illegal bird trade are believed to be the causes of the spread. Some mammals such as cats and lions were also infected.
- Several other strains of the virus such as H5N2 and H5N8 jumped from animals to humans, thus becoming a global public health concern.
- People coming in close contact with infected alive or dead birds have contracted the H5N1 bird flu, and it does not usually spread from person to person.

### Reason for worry

- H5N1 is severe and deadly – around 6 out of 10 confirmed cases in humans have led to deaths. The mortality is quite higher.
- If the virus mutates and becomes easily transmissible from person to person, it can potentially cause a pandemic.
- The avian influenza attacks the respiratory tract of humans and may cause severe respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia or Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS). Its early symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, and sometimes abdominal pain and diarrhoea.

### Preventing outbreak

- Among poultry birds, vaccination strategies advised by the World Organisation for Animal Health can be used to prevent the flu.
- Eradicating the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) at its source to decrease the disease in avian species and further human infections.



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