Avian influenza virus reappears in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

On 19 February, two laboratories confirmed the presence of the A(H5N1) influenza virus in a nine-year-old boy admitted to a hospital in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China on 12 February. The boy has recovered, but his father and sister, who had similar symptoms, have died. On 20 February the Hong Kong SAR Government Virus Unit confirmed that the father, aged 33, had been infected with the A(H5N1) virus. Both the boy and his father had travelled to Fujian Province (China) in January.

A(H5N1) was first seen in humans in 1997 when an outbreak of 18 cases caused six deaths in Hong Kong SAR. Until then, this virus had been seen only in birds, including ducks and chickens, causing high mortality in the latter. In December 1997, all chickens in Hong Kong SAR were slaughtered, as they were thought to be the cause of this outbreak in humans. No further cases of this disease were reported in humans.

WHO is in close contact with the health authorities in Beijing, and in Hong Kong SAR. The WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network has been alerted and additional reagents for laboratory diagnosis are being made available to National Influenza Centres and other members of the Global Influenza Network.

Updates are posted on WHO's Disease Outbreak News site, at http://www.who.int/csr/don/2003_02_20/en