

CHINA

Flu milder this year, but shouldn't be taken lightly

By WANG XIAOYU
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China is having a milder flu season than last winter, but the peak won't fade until late January.

The latest report released by the Chinese National Influenza Center logged an increase of flu outbreaks and samples testing positive for the flu virus since mid-December, with the H1N1 strain of influenza as the dominant type, followed by the H3N2 strain.

"Large parts of the country have entered the flu season, flu viruses are trending upward," according to the report, which was released on Friday.

Last year's flu epidemic was the most aggressive in recent years, claiming 106 lives in January and February 2018, which surpassed the previous two years combined, according to the National Health Commission.

"This winter's influenza is not as severe. In Beijing, the growth rate of flu outbreaks in kindergartens and primary schools has already slowed down," said Pang Xinghuo, deputy director of the Beijing Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

She added that the peak of infections is expected to trail off in mid-to late-January, following the usual pattern.

Despite the milder flu season, hospitals in major cities are scrambling to meet the sudden influx of patients with flu symptoms.

Xiamen Children's Hospital in Xiamen, Fujian province, recently saw a record-breaking 2,300 hospi-

tal visits in one day, largely due to a surge in children seeking treatment for fever, coughs and other flu symptoms, according to its WeChat account.

A similar surge also occurred at Beijing Ditan Hospital. Li Xinwang, director of the hospital's center for infectious diseases, noticed an uptick in visits by children and elderly people with flu symptoms.

"Flu-induced deaths are most common among the elderly over 70 and those with respiratory illnesses or cardiovascular issues," he said.

Li suggested that vulnerable groups receive vaccinations or take precautions, such as taking medications for flu in advance if their family members or friends catch it.

A shortage of flu vaccines affecting much of China since October stirred concerns about the incoming peak flu season. Pang said Beijing has adequate supplies of flu vaccine, and 1.24 million doses have been administered so far, roughly the same as last year.

"Though prime time for inoculation, from late October to early December, has passed, people who fail to get flu shots during the recommended periods can still contact clinics as flu vaccine is now in full stock," she said.

"The peak travel season during the Spring Festival holiday is approaching, and a large number of people are planning to travel abroad. It's important to keep a close watch on infectious diseases at their destinations and take precautionary measures on the road," she said.

Tying the knot



Fifteen couples have a traditional Chinese-style group wedding at a construction site on the Anqing-Jiujiang high-speed railway in Jiujiang, Jiangxi province, on Tuesday. The knots they hold between them signify their connection. JI HAIXUE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Five GM products approved for import into mainland

Usage will be limited to processing materials, such as edible oil and feed

By WANG XIAODONG
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China approved five more genetically modified products for import, bringing the total number of approved GM products to 31.

The five products are two rapeseed varieties and two soybean varieties that are resistant to weed-killers, and a corn variety that is resistant to both pests and weed-killers, according to a list released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs on Tuesday.

The GM plants can only be used as raw materials for other products, such as edible oil and feed. Producers include Monsanto in the United States and Germany's BASF, the ministry said.

Certificates for exporting the

products to China expire in December 2021, it said.

The ministry also renewed its approval for importation of 26 GMO products, including varieties of corn, cotton and soybeans.

GMO agricultural products must be clearly labeled for sale in the country under Chinese regulations.

Wang Xiping, a professor of life sciences at Beijing Normal University, said that since the five latest products can be used only as raw material, they will only be processed into products such as animal feed and rapeseed oil and soybean oil, which do not contain GM elements. They will not be sold to domestic consumers to eat.

"The GM elements in these products will not enter the human body, so there are no GMO food safety concerns for humans," she said.

China has very tight policies on approval of GMO products that can be sold for consumption. Most approved GMO products available on the domestic market are imported, Wang said.

China has approved two agricultural products — cotton and papaya — for commercial planting, but allows import of some GMO agricultural products, including soybeans, for food production, the ministry said.

Some GMO agricultural products have special characteristics, such as resistance to pests and weedkillers, and are in great demand, Wang said.

Most soybeans China imports are GM products that have higher oil content than domestically bred species and meet China's demand for edible oil, she said. But oil contains few GM elements, she said.

GM technology is a controversial topic worldwide. Scientists in general favor developing and promot-

ing the technology for its economic benefits. Voices questioning the safety of such crops for the public are also common.

Zhang Taolin, vice-minister of agriculture and rural affairs, said China encourages scientific research in genetic modification technology but remains cautious when promoting GM technology and products to ensure safety.

"GM technology can be safely controlled, judging from scientific principles and practices over past decades," he said.

Huang Jikun, director of China Center for Agricultural Policy at Peking University, said GM technology plays a very important role in increasing agricultural productivity, improving food security and increasing farmers' incomes.

"GM technology can greatly reduce the use of pesticides to improve food safety," he said. "Overuse of pesticides is a major food safety problem."



Patients get intravenous drips at Children's Hospital of Nanjing Medical University in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, on Tuesday. According to the hospital, the number of child patients increased by 30 percent over a normal day, most of them with colds and fevers. SONG NING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Crimes involving guns, explosives fall steadily

By ZHANG YANGFEI
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China has seen a steady decline in the number of gun and explosives-related crimes, putting it on the list of countries with the fewest such crimes in the world, the Ministry of Public Security announced on Tuesday at a news briefing.

From January to November, the country saw 42 gun crimes and 39 explosives-related crimes, down year-on-year by roughly one-third, the ministry said.

42 cases

Number of gun crimes from January to November last year

A zero-tolerance policy against such crimes will be maintained, said Li Jingsheng, director of the ministry's bureau of security administration.

Focusing on the production, smuggling and online sales of guns and explosives, the ministry will continue to work closely with other departments and take strict measures to ensure a full and profound crackdown on such crimes, he said.

"We will continue to take systematic steps to curb the spread of guns and explosives," he said, adding that the authorities will increase their efforts to supervise border and online transactions, as well as mining operations that used explosives.

The ministry will also strengthen controls on raw materials and apply information technology in an effort to improve safety controls at the

source to nip potential risks in the bud, he said.

A joint accountability mechanism has been established to further clarify the responsibilities of local authorities, companies and central departments, he added.

The ministry, together with 23 other departments, launched a nationwide campaign in February that will last until December this year, as one of a series of attempts to reduce security threats from firearms and ammunition. Individuals may not own firearms in China.

Li said the campaign has yielded fruit, with more than 37,000 cases involving guns and explosives solved and 416 gangs and 599 criminal operations busted. The police have also arrested about 43,000 suspects and confiscated more than 146,000 guns and a large quantity of dynamite and detonators.

The authorities have also examined companies and individuals that manufacture or sell hazardous chemicals, mine explosives and fireworks to root out safety hazards, and have formulated industry standards to better regulate them, he said.

The Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Supreme People's Court and the ministry have jointly issued policies urging suspects to surrender voluntarily and encouraging members of the public to report suspicious activities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also initiated communications with other countries to strengthen international law enforcement cooperation.

"The public security bodies will always put a priority on safeguarding people's lives and property, as well as on social stability," Li said.

23 years after 3-year-old was abducted, mother rewarded in flood of tears

By YANG JUN in Guiyang and LI LEI in Beijing

For the last 23 years, vegetable vendor Fan Shiyong has refused to relocate her stall in Kaili, a county-level city in Guizhou province.

The mother has held a glimmer of hope that her son, Liang Shuisheng — who was abducted from the market in the summer of 1995 when he was 3 years old — would find his way back.

Her dream came true on Sunday, as the volunteer association Baobei Huijia (Baby Back Home) helped reunite the pair at the local police station after a DNA match was made. More than 30 of her relatives were present.

The son, now 26, was named Cai Jianghuai by his foster family in Nan'an, Fujian province. He is married and will become a father in March.

"The rock hanging in my bosom finally touched the ground," the 53-year-old mother sobbed as Cai knelt before her.

In August 1995, Fan left her 3-year-old son at the stall to look for her husband, but when she came back only a couple of minutes later, he was gone, Fan said.

The couple reported the case to the police, but the search came up empty.

"We expanded our search to the provincial capital, Guiyang. We searched for days without eating,"

Fan said, adding she was also a regular visitor at gatherings organized by parents whose children had been lost. She also provided blood samples in 2010.

In 2016, Cai registered with the Baobei Huijia after watching *Waiting For Me*, a China Central Television program aired in cooperation with the association. But it was not until last year that he agreed to give a blood sample, a crucial step that helped end the grueling search.

Though he was aware growing up that he was adopted, Cai had been told he had been sold by his biological parents. That was the reason he had declined to give a blood sample, he said.

"But the volunteers argued that it was unlikely I had been sold by my parents," he said, adding that he could remember little except that someone had clutched him all the way to Fujian on the train or bus and that he ended up in his foster family. The household registration document said he was adopted from Guizhou.

Wen Qingyong, a volunteer who had followed the search, said it's hard to determine whether the foster parents had paid money to human traffickers for the boy, and it's unlikely that Cai will sue them since they had gone to the trouble of raising him.

Human traffickers can receive the death penalty in China, but



Fan Shiyong, 53, is overwhelmed with emotion after reuniting with her son, Liang Shuisheng, in Kaili, Guizhou province, on Sunday. Liang was abducted 23 years ago. WU XUXIONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

those who purchase children were once exempt from criminal punishment so long as the victim was not abused or prevented from leaving.

However, a revision to the Criminal Law in 2015 made it a crime to buy children, though offenders could be given leniency if no abuse was found.

Founded in 2007, Baobei Huijia has more than 40,000 volunteers

and has helped 2,700 abducted or otherwise missing children reunite with their families. Its founder, Zhang Baoyan, and her husband, Qin Yanyou, established a foundation of the same name in 2010.

Li Hanyi contributed to this story.

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