

# No potential of pandemic from new virus found in China: S'pore expert

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A letter in *The New England Journal of Medicine* on a new virus discovered in eastern China has sparked some concern internationally.

All the 35 people infected in China's Shandong and Henan provinces had fever, with a few among them more seriously ill with severe pneumonia.

Published on Aug 4, the letter by a team of researchers from China, Singapore and Australia noted that so far, the virus – called Langya henipavirus, or LayV for short – appears to have spread only from animals to humans.

The Sars-CoV-2 virus, which caused the Covid-19 pandemic, also started in China from animal to human transmission.

Fears were further stoked when the Taiwan Centres for Disease Control's deputy director-general Chuang Jen-hsiang held a media briefing on Sunday to announce that it is working on a nucleic acid testing method to identify the new virus.

However, Professor Wang Linfa, an expert in emerging infectious diseases at the Duke-NUS Medical School who is involved in the LayV study, said there is no need to panic. "There is no potential of a pandemic from this virus. We need to be alert, but not alarmed," he added.

Prof Wang told *The Straits Times* that the last case in the retrospective study was infected in January last year.

None of the cases involved human to human transmission.

He said that if there had been any danger from this novel virus, the team would have issued a media release, and not just publish a letter in a medical journal.

The research team said in the letter that the virus likely jumped from shrews, small animals resembling mice, to humans.

Of the 35 people infected with LayV since 2018 in Shandong and

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# Reports of virus' high fatality rates wrong: Expert

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Henan provinces, 26 had no other infections.

So, their symptoms – which included fever, fatigue, cough, anorexia, myalgia (pain in the muscles) and nausea – would have been caused by this virus.

Of these 26 patients, 22 were farmers, three were factory workers and one was a student.

The novel virus was discovered through sentinel surveillance, which is an early detection system, of patients with fever who had recent exposure to animals.

Genomic sequencing of a sample obtained from a throat swab of one patient found that it was related to other henipaviruses.

Further investigation using the genomic sequence of LayV discovered 34 others who had been infected since 2018.

Prof Wang said some media reports quoting fatality rates of 40 per cent to 75 per cent were confusing the novel virus with two other viruses.

LayV is a henipavirus, as are the Nipah and Hendra viruses. Nipah and Hendra are known to have high fatality rates, but neither is easily transmitted. Langya is named af-



The Langya henipavirus, or LayV, likely jumped from shrews to humans, said the team of researchers from China, Singapore and Australia.

## NO NEED FOR ALARM

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**PROFESSOR WANG LINFA**,  
who is involved in the LayV study.

ter the district in China where it was first detected, similar to how Nipah is named after Sungei Nipah in the Malaysian state of Negeri Sembilan.

There is currently no recorded death from LayV.

In China, the Global Times reported the results of the study on Tuesday.

It quoted deputy chief physician Wang Xinyu of the department

of infectious diseases of Huashan Hospital as saying: “The coronavirus will not be the last infectious disease to cause a pandemic worldwide, as new infectious diseases will have an increasingly greater impact on human daily life.”

Prof Wang said it is important to know that another virus apart from the coronavirus can cause severe pneumonia in people.

The study found that patients who developed pneumonia following LayV infection all had higher amounts of the virus than the rest.

Prof Wang added, too, that in his years spent working with new infectious diseases, he has learnt “never to say never”.

But the chances of LayV turning out to be another Sars-CoV-2 virus that caused the Covid-19 pandemic are highly unlikely, he said.

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