

The Tanah Karo Cluster Timeline (May 24, 2006)

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Below, is a timeline for the Tanah Karo cluster. Below the timeline is additional information to elaborate and explain the events covered in it. The facts surrounding this outbreak are still very unclear, however, they are slowly becoming clearer. Thus, the information provided below may not be entirely accurate and is subject to change.

| Date | Event | Notes |
|----------|---|--|
| April 27 | The mother (Terang Beru Ginting) shows first symptoms | 37 years old according to the WHO. While the woman was buried before she could be tested, the WHO said it considers her the Index Case. |
| April 28 | Roy Karokaro shows first symptoms | Son of Terang Beru Ginting Onset of disease based on local media reports that he showed first symptoms 11 days before his death. |
| April 29 | Family holds barbecue | More than 15 people attended, according to media reports. Pork and chicken were consumed. According to WHO statement of May 24, Roy Karokaro, Boni Karkaro, and a 25-year-old brother sleep in the same small room with Terang Beru Ginting that night, while she was symptomatic and coughing frequently. |
| April 30 | | |
| May 1 | | |
| May 2 | | |
| May 3 | | |
| May 4 | Terang Beru Ginting dies | Some local reports say she died at RSU Kabanjahe hospital, Kabupaten, Tanah Karo Regency, North Sumatra province. She was buried without being tested for H5N1. |
| May 5 | Last person in cluster to fall ill shows first symptoms | |
| May 6 | | |
| May 7 | | |
| May 8 | | |
| May 9 | Roy Karokaro dies at RSU Adam Malik hospital | Died at RSU Adam Malik hospital. Son of Terang Beru Ginting, aged 19 or 15. The cluster comes to the attention of the international community. |
| May 10 | Anta Beru Ginting dies at about 5 a.m. local time | female, aged 29 or 28, died at RSU Adam Malik hospital. Identified by some sources as a sister of Terang Beru Ginting. She was also said by some local sources to live in Kabanjahe, the capital of the Karo Regency. |
| May 11 | | |

| Date | Event | Notes |
|--------|---|--|
| May 12 | Boni Karkaro dies | <p>Male, aged 18 or 17, brother of Roy Karokaro, died at RSU Adam Malik hospital.</p> <p>Local sources reported that 12 people remained hospitalized in RSUP Adam with suspected bird flu symptoms. It was not stated if these people were other relatives, friends and neighbors, or just what was their exact association with the original cluster members.</p> <p>Local sources also reported that, worried by the spread of the disease, provincial officials in North Sumatra ordered the Karo district health service to sterilize the family's home along with an area of 1-kilometer radius surrounding it.</p> |
| May 13 | Rafael Ginting dies | <p>Male, age 8 or 10, died at about 2 p.m. local time, at RS Elizabeth hospital, also in Medan. All sources except one have him dying at RS Elizabeth hospital. That source says RSU Adam Malik hospital.</p> <p>Almost all sources (as of May 24) identify him as a son of Jones Ginting.</p> <p>Local media report panic in the region.</p> |
| May 14 | Brenata Beru Tarigan dies | <p>Female, aged 18 months, was originally reported as having died on May 12. It was later learned that she did not die until May 14. This date was confirmed that day by I Nyoman Kandun, Director General of Disease Control at the health ministry.</p> |
| May 15 | 32-year-old brother of Terang Beru Ginting shows the first symptoms of H5N1. | <p>Tests of animals in the area of the village show no sign of H5N1.</p> <p>There has been considerable confusion between this brother, whose name has not been released, and the 25-year-old brother, whose name is believed to be Jones Ginting. The 25-year-old brother showed symptoms early, while the 32-year-old brother did not show the first symptoms until May 15, two days after his son died, according to a WHO statement of May 23.</p> |
| May 16 | | |
| May 17 | | |
| May 18 | <p>The Indonesian health ministry announces that laboratory tests of pigs from Kubu Sembilang village were positive</p> <p>The WHO announces that the cluster likely was NOT the result of human-to-human transmission.</p> <p>The WHO announces that it is expanding the team of scientists in North Sumatra which is looking for the source of the disease.</p> | <p>According to one vet with the Indonesian government, field tests had all returned negative results.</p> <p>Medical epidemiologists Thomas Grein and Timothy Uyeki will join the team already on the ground there.</p> |

| Date | Event | Notes |
|--------|--|--|
| May 19 | <p>The Indonesian health ministry announces that further tests on the pigs from Kubu Sembilang village show that the animals are negative for H5N1.</p> <p>The WHO steps back from saying that the disease is not the result of human-to-human transmission, and says that the mode of transmission is still unknown.</p> <p>The WHO team meets with Karo regency officials.</p> | |
| May 20 | | |
| May 21 | Local tests were conducted on 32-year-old brother and showed positive for H5N1 | Samples from the brother flown to Jakarta the same day for analysis, according to WHO statement of May 23. |
| May 22 | 32-year-old brother of Terang Beru Ginting dies | <p>The Indonesian Ministry of Health confirms that a 32-year-old brother of Terang Beru Ginting died Monday morning, local time. They indicate that the man was the father of Rafael Ginting.</p> <p>The WHO statement of May 24 notes that he had cared for the child closely during his child's illness.</p> <p>I Nyoman Kandun, Director General of Communicable Disease Control, provided the following information: "He is the father of the child who died on May 13. He ran away after he received Tamiflu. He was found in the village later but refused treatment."</p> |
| May 23 | A statement by the WHO states that there is "no evidence of significant mutations" that would make the virus more transmissible among humans. | <p>The WHO has (as of May 23) sequenced specimens from two of the Tanah Karo victims.</p> <p>The WHO statement noted that the virus lineage was very similar to that of virus samples taken from birds in the North Sumatra area during a previous outbreak.</p> |
| May 24 | | |

Additional Information:

Factual Issues:

Based on Indonesian Ministry of Health and WHO statements, the cluster now (May 24) stands at eight victims, all from the same family. Of these, seven are dead and one is still alive.

There is still some disagreement over the ages of most of the victims. While the ages of Terang Beru Ginting and the toddler Brenata Beru Tarigan seem to be fixed at 37 years and 18 months respectively, the reported ages of the rest of the family varied by as much as 10 years in published reports, some of them coming from government officials.

Also, the reports of the toddler's gender have shifted several times. In reports written early in the outbreak, the child was identified as a girl. This was quickly changed to a boy. However, in recent statements by the Indonesian government and the WHO, the child is again identified as a girl. Given this "official information", this document treats the child as a girl until further information disproves this.

General Facts:

Some local news sources stated that the family lived in the same small home, while other sources indicate that they lived close to one another in the same village, but in different homes. In any case, the family was taken to Medan (the provincial capital) for hospitalization at the RSU (Central Public Hospital) Adam Malik hospital.

It was reported by the WHO, that after the family barbecue on April 29, three family members slept in the same small room with Terang Beru Ginting (the index). These three people included her two sons and a 25-year-old brother, all of whom became ill soon after. This last point disagrees with local reports that stated that one of the sons first showed symptoms on April 28, one day before the barbecue. WHO reported that Ms. Ginting, who began showing symptoms on April 27, coughed throughout the night.

On May 13, both local and international media reported that it was believed that one or more family members originally contracted the disease from contact with contaminated fertilizer. According to local sources, the family often bought manure from the Binjai and Langkat (whether these are individuals, a company, or a nearby geographical region is unclear), whose poultry had recently been found positive for the H5N1 virus. As reported in the timeline above, tests on the fertilizer have so far (May 19) been negative. However, since the village's farm animals have also tested negative for the disease, suspicion has again moved back to the fertilizer. On May 17, Reuters reported an unidentified source in the Indonesian government as saying that manure at the family home was also tested and was negative.

It was revealed by the Indonesian Ministry of Health on May 23, that efforts to test animals in and around the village where the family lived have been less than thorough. The ministry said this was because villagers have been extremely uncooperative.

On May 17, WHO representatives told Reuters that samples were tested from 11 pigs, four geese, four ducks, and an unspecified number of chickens in the family's village. All tests so far have been negative for the H5N1 virus.

H5N1 has been in Indonesia since 2003. The first human infections were not reported until 2005.

The Eighth Victim:

Original governmental reports and almost all media reports indicated that there was an eighth case, however this person was never identified. On May 17, the WHO resolved this issue by stating that the purported eighth case was a woman who had a fever for one day, tested negative for H5N1 and has now completely recovered from whatever ailment she had.

However, on May 22, an eighth case was revealed. WHO reported that the father of the 10-year-old (some sources say 8) boy (Rafael Ginting) who died on May 13, became ill on May 15, and died on May 22 (see elsewhere in this time line).

Jones Ginting

There has been considerable confusion about the illness and death of Jones Ginting. Reports that he fled from authorities when they attempted to treat him are apparently true. Helen Branswell, of the Canadian Press, reported the following on May 22: "Meanwhile, an Indonesian official revealed that the man who died Monday refused treatment and fled from authorities after falling ill — behaviour that highlights the difficulties of disease containment in settings where an unfamiliar disease is extracting a high death toll."

However, in the same story, she also reported that one member of the Tanah Karo cluster remained alive, a brother of the original victim (Terang Beru Ginting). From all other reports, this should be Jones Ginting himself.

This was cleared up by WHO, when, also on May 22, they reported that the living cluster member was a 25-year-old brother. Evidently, this brother and Jones Ginting were being confused during the initial reporting.

Here is what we know (with reasonable certainty) about the two brothers:

- One of the two is named Jones Ginting (which one is not certain, though it probably is the 32-year-old).
- The 25-year-old brother is still alive.
- The 32-year-old brother cared for his son (Rafael Ginting) during the latter's illness and hospitalization.
- At one point, the 32-year-old brother took his son and fled the hospital. He was later found and he and the child were returned to a hospital (some sources say it was RSU Adam Malik, while others say it was RS Elizabeth, both in Medan).
- The 32-year-old brother's son (Rafael Ginting) died on May 13.
- His father, the 32-year-old brother, showed the first symptoms of the disease on May 15.
- Doctors treated him with Tamiflu.
- After this initial treatment, the 32-year-old brother refused further treatment and fled the hospital.
- The 32-year-old brother was cared for by friends until his death on the morning of May 22.

Reporting Issues

There are many issues involved in getting news of this outbreak out of Medan and North Sumatra. First, is the problem that local news sources are all in Indonesian, which not only is a different language, but even has a different character set (alphabet) from English. Second, the accuracy of local news sources is highly questionable. Third, both hospital and government officials may not always be forthcoming with information about victims or the course of the disease. Government sources are particularly unreliable both for political as well as knowledge-based reasons.

Readers also should be aware of the following language issues with reports coming out of the North Sumatra area:

The name Karokaro is sometimes transliterated as Karakar or as Karo-karo.

The name Beru is sometimes transliterated as Boru, and is often abbreviated as Br.