

# China's bird flu toll may be higher

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China's bird flu death toll may be higher than the 12 people reported dead by the central government, The Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday.

A person familiar with the situation told the newspaper some local officials may have concealed suspected cases of avian flu.

"The central government was quite upset from receiving information late from local officials," said the person, who had spoken with Chinese ministry officials. "They weren't happy."

A Ministry of Health spokesman told the newspaper some hospitals have

simply not reported severe pneumonia cases in which the cause is not known.

However, the ministry's Web site Tuesday repeated a March warning that coverup or delay in reporting pneumonia cases could spread the disease.

Avian flu, first reported in Asia, has spread to Europe and Africa.

While the number of cases remains relatively small, the potential of the virus mutating and allowing human-to-human transmission has prompted worldwide pandemic fears.

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