



Bird Flu News 01-05 September 2006

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Indonesia says targets \$100 mln for bird flu fight

01 Sep 2006

JAKARTA, Sept 1 (Reuters) - Indonesia hopes to secure about \$100 million to fight bird flu next year, the vice president said on Friday, after criticism the country is not doing enough to control the disease.

Indonesia has the world's highest death toll from bird flu and scientists and even the World Bank have called on the government to step up the fight to control a disease that is endemic in almost all provinces.

Experts said public ignorance, along with official ineptitude and lack of money, are hampering efforts to stamp out the disease in the densely populated country of 220 million people.

"I asked for certainty from the World Bank and they asked for certainty from our budget. So, both of us ascertained to gather at least \$100 million for next year," Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla said on Friday.

It was not immediately clear whether this meant the government's financial commitment in the budget to fight the H5N1 bird flu virus would be raised.

The World Bank has been urging Jakarta to increase its budget after it earmarked \$46.5 million to fight bird flu in 2007, down from \$57.37 million slated for this year.

According to government data, together with donor contributions, Indonesia plans to spend about \$93 million this year in fighting bird flu.

Welfare Minister Aburizal Bakrie said last month Indonesia had not received "a single cent" pledged by international donors at a global bird flu conference in Beijing in January.

The donors promised \$1.9 billion for the global fight and the World Health Organisation has also criticised some governments for their failure to pay up.

On Thursday, a leading bird flu expert urged Indonesia to do more animal surveillance to curb the H5N1 virus, which has killed 46 people so far in the country. Most of the deaths have occurred this year.

Last week, the World Bank urged Indonesia to increase its budget for the bird flu programme, saying the virus was a severe threat to the country's economy and the health of its people.



CAMPAIGN

The government launched a nationwide campaign on Friday to improve public awareness about the disease, saying the threat would likely increase during the upcoming wet season.

"Like in any other tropical country, influenza symptoms usually increase during the rainy season in Indonesia," said Bayu Krisnamurthi, head of the National Committee for Avian Influenza Control and Pandemic Preparedness.

"The bird flu virus has similar characteristics to the common influenza virus, so we want the people to be aware of how to deal with it," he said at a ceremony to launch the programme.

Indonesia's rainy season usually starts in October.

Gianfranco Rotigliano, representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Indonesia, said educating the public would not be easy in the vast country, which comprises thousands of islands, myriad religions and hundreds of local languages.

"The challenge is huge, but I think we will be up to the task," Rotigliano said.

Although bird flu remains essentially an animal disease, experts fear it could mutate into a form that can pass easily among humans, possibly killing millions.

New fears that the virus had mutated arose this month after a series of confirmed or suspected cases in people in a remote area of West Java, where bird flu is rife in poultry.

The World Health Organisation said there has been no evidence that human-to-human transmission had occurred in the area.

- Source: Reuters

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400 Volunteers Needed for 2nd Trial of Bird Flu Vaccine

September 1, 2006



400 volunteers are needed for the second round of testing of a bird flu vaccine, after the first phase of clinical trials showed that it is safe for human use.

The second phase of clinical trials, being considered by the State Food and Drug Administration (SFDA), would test how long the vaccine would protect the human body against the deadly H5N1 virus, said Lin Jiangtao, one of the doctors leading the program at the Sino-Japanese Friendship Hospital where the first round of testing took place.

"The second phase will need 300 to 400 volunteers," said Lin, adding that the exact number would be decided by the SFDA.

Results from the first round, which ended in June, showed that the 120 people who were vaccinated had no serious adverse reactions.

Lin said that mild fever after inoculation was a normal reaction.

The trials indicated that a 10-microgram dosage of the vaccine gave the best results, stimulating 78.3 percent of protective antibodies, exceeding the European Union standard of 70 percent for a flu vaccine.



The second phase would test similar dosages on volunteers to find out how best to stimulate the most antibodies, which requires a larger pool of volunteers, Lin said.

Prospective volunteers should be aged 18 to 65, but children and pregnant women will not be allowed to participate.

The vaccine must undergo three rounds of testing before it is allowed on the market, researchers said.

Sinovac Biotech Limited, which jointly developed the vaccine with the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, announced earlier this week that it would expand production facilities to produce massive quantities of human bird flu vaccine once testing is complete.

Bird flu remains essentially an animal disease, but experts fear that the H5N1 virus could mutate into a form that could spread easily among humans.

The virus has killed 14 people in China since 2003.

- Source: Xinhua News Agency

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Low-risk H5N1 bird flu found in Pennsylvania ducks

02 Sep 2006



WASHINGTON, Sept 2 (Reuters) - Mallard ducks in Maryland have tested positive for bird flu, apparently a common, less pathogenic strain that poses no risk to humans, the United States Agriculture and Interior departments said on Friday.

The H5N1 avian influenza virus was found in fecal samples from "resident wild" mallards in Queen Anne's County in Maryland, on the US central Atlantic coast.

"Testing has ruled out the possibility of this being the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain that has spread through birds in Asia, Europe and Africa," said the United States Department of Agriculture. "Test results thus far indicate this is low pathogenic avian influenza, which poses no risk to human health."

Five to 10 more days will be needed for definitive tests to confirm whether low pathogenic H5N1 bird flu was found in the US for the 2nd time in 2006. On 14 Aug 2006, the virus was found in 2 mute swans in Michigan. Scientists say low pathogenic avian influenza commonly occurs in wild fowl.

The Maryland mallards did not appear sick so the samples, collected on 2 Aug 2006 as part of a research project, were not given high priority when sent to USDA labs for testing. "The birds are alive and well," said a USDA spokeswoman.

The low pathogenic strain of H5N1 has been found 6 other times in the US since 1975. Mild and low pathogenic strains of bird flu are common in the US and other countries.

The H5N1 bird flu strain has killed an estimated 141 people and forced hundreds of millions of birds to be destroyed, mostly in Asia. As a precaution, the US government stepped up testing of wild birds for avian influenza in the continental US this year.

- Source: Reuters

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Bird flu research must be shared faster

03 September 2006



It gives a new meaning to the phrase "publish or perish". Scientists have not been sharing information about bird flu fast enough, say experts. While the World Health Organization keeps a database of viral sequences, access has been restricted, and other researchers have hoarded data for fear of rivals publishing it without giving them credit.

"Scientists have not been sharing information about bird flu fast enough" To tackle these problems, researchers have now formed a consortium called the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data, which encourages scientists to deposit findings about the virus in databases such as the US-based GenBank within six months of discovery (Nature, DOI: 10.1038/nature442981a).

While many applaud the endeavour, they also worry that even six months is too long. "It's not soon enough," says Peter Palese, an influenza researcher at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. Earlier last week the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it would also speed up the release of sequence data relating to influenza viruses.

- Source: *New Scientist*

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Bird flu: a new sampling campaign is planned in Africa

04.09.2006

Asia, Europe, Africa... The bird flu epidemic has not needed a passport to cross borders, but has almost certainly required a vector. What sort? This is one of the questions that is still bothering researchers. Migrating wild birds have been at the heart of the debate on the matter ever since the crisis began. However, we also know that legal and illegal trade circuits play a major role in disease spread within countries.

For Emmanuel Camus, Director of CIRAD's Animal Production and Veterinary Medicine Department, "both types of vector are suspected. The balance may swing one way or the other, depending on the situation ". While legal trade circuits are more or less familiar, it will be less easy to evaluate the role of illegal circuits. As regards the role of migrating wild birds, an initial campaign of 5000 samples has been conducted by CIRAD, in conjunction with the NGO Wetlands International and the FAO, in 14 countries since January 2006.

Their analyses have not revealed any trace of the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus to date. However, we cannot state with any certainty that wild birds are not responsible, since we do not yet have certain data. Conversely, the analyses did reveal the existence of other less pathogenic avian viruses, and provided further information about the ecology of the bird flu virus in the tropics.

A new sampling campaign is scheduled in Africa as of September 2006, at more sites. Moreover, research recently showed that while bird flu viruses are generally found in the cloaca, H5N1 concentration is even higher in the respiratory tract of infected birds. In the next campaign, samples will thus also be taken from the larynx of each bird.

This new sampling operation will be facilitated by better local infrastructures: Africa will shortly have some ten laboratories capable of diagnosing the disease, compared to just one at the end of 2005. Moreover, the CIRAD "Control of Emerging and Exotic Animal Diseases" Research Unit's analysis laboratory in Montpellier should have automatic equipment by the autumn, enabling it to handle up to 400 samples a day and provide more rapid diagnoses.



Over and above the existence of the virus within flocks, researchers also need to understand intracontinental bird movements in particular. In effect, in addition to migration patterns, which have been known for some time, there are also bird movements within Africa, particularly from West to East and South to North, that may play a significant role in spreading the disease. To determine that role, CIRAD is planning to work with Wetlands International and the Wildlife Conservation Society to capture birds early this coming winter and fit them with very lightweight satellite transmitters so as to monitor their movements.

- Source: innovations report - Bad Homburg, Germany

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Bird flu re-emerges in Egyptian poultry after lull

04 September 2006



CAIRO, Sept 4 (Reuters) - Egypt has detected four new cases of bird flu in poultry, the first infections found in two months of a disease that has killed six people in the country this year and wracked its poultry industry, officials said on Monday.

Three of the cases were found late last week in so-called "backyard", or domestically bred, poultry in the Egyptian capital while a fourth was detected in a village near the southern city of Sohag, an agriculture ministry official said.

The cases of the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza virus were the first detected in birds in Egypt in roughly two months. Egypt has had the largest cluster of human bird flu cases outside of Asia.

No human cases have been reported since May.

"It is significant," Hassan el-Bushra, regional adviser for communicable diseases surveillance at the World Health Organisation, said of the new poultry cases. "It tells us that the virus is still circulating."

Bird flu infected 14 Egyptians, killing six, between March and May after the virus first surfaced in Egyptian poultry in February.

The outbreak caused panic in Egypt, where chicken is a major source of protein and where poor families frequently breed chicken domestically in cities and rural areas to supplement their diet and income.

Chickens on rooftops may be particularly susceptible to catching the virus from infected migrant birds, which fly along the densely populated Nile valley during migration, experts have suggested.

RISK FOR HUMANS EXISTS

The new bird flu cases found in poultry mean that there is still a risk of human cases in Egypt, but a large outbreak was less likely to take hold or spread so long as Egypt continues to vaccinate poultry, the World Health Organisation's Bushra said.

"The risk is going to be much less than what we had before, but it is still there," Bushra told Reuters, adding Egypt had a more than adequate supply of Tamiflu, an anti-viral medication thought to be the best way to fight bird flu in humans.

"It's not going to be the same ... If the virus emerges again, it wouldn't spread rapidly because the poultry would be vaccinated. It may come to a dead end," he said.



The vast majority of Egyptian commercial poultry flocks have been vaccinated, while 20 percent of domestic birds had received vaccines, the agriculture ministry official said.

Most of the people infected in Egypt became ill after coming into contact with "backyard" birds, officials said. Egypt has culled 30 million birds since February to contain the virus.

An official from the Food and Agriculture Organisation said the expected onset of cooler weather in the autumn could still cause a flare-up of cases in poultry, and urged increased surveillance accompanied by a fair compensation scheme.

"The weather is getting colder ... It might flare up the situation. The virus likes colder weather," said Talib Ali, FAO's regional officer for animal health.

Two separate officials said the onset of warm weather, combined with Egyptian government measures, may have helped keep the virus at bay during the summer months.

Officials said Egypt detected the four new poultry cases during a surveillance and testing campaign, stepped up in recent weeks, that included random checks on domestic poultry.

- Source: Reuters

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Bird flu fear as 100 ducks die in Vietnam

05 September 2006



MORE than 100 ducks have died suddenly in southern Vietnam in a suspected new bird flu outbreak.

Another 400 ducks were culled and samples were sent to the Ho Chi Minh City Regional Veterinary Centre for testing to determine whether the H5N1 strain of bird flu was responsible for the deaths discovered on Friday.

Vietnam had not reported any outbreaks in poultry this year until the virus was detected through random testing in a handful of birds in southern Ben Tre province last month.

- Source: Scotsman - United Kingdom

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