



Bird Flu News 06 – 10 Oct. 2006

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China warns of shortfalls in bird flu fight

Thu 5 Oct 2006

BEIJING, Oct 5 (Reuters) - China still faces serious shortcomings in its bird flu prevention preparations and government departments must do better ahead of the autumn season, a vice agriculture minister said on Thursday.

"At present, the bird flu virus situation in our country is generally stable, but as we go into the peak outbreak season in the autumn, the prevention situation is still serious," Yin Chengjie told a provincial bird flu meeting.

"There still exist weak links in our bird flu fight work," he was quoted as saying in a statement posted on the Agriculture Ministry's Web site (www.agri.gov.cn).

China this week announced two poultry outbreaks in the remote northwest, leading to the culling of thousands of birds, in the first reported cases since early August.

Some provinces were preparing too slowly, did not have enough staff, vaccines or funds and the problem was especially acute in villages, Yin said, without naming specific parts of the country.

It was important to step up measures ahead of the autumn, when migrating birds -- which have been blamed for outbreaks in the past -- would pass through China again, he said.

"We must soberly recognise the seriousness of the current fight against bird flu and not underestimate the seriousness of the work," Yin told the meeting, which was attended by China's top veterinarian, Jia Youling.

HIGH ALERT

Yin said the provinces must ready their emergency response systems and ensure there were enough good quality vaccines.

He said his ministry would dispatch teams to the countryside to ensure measures being taken were up to scratch.



"We cannot lower our guard," he said.

The H5N1 virus has spread through Asia's poultry flocks and infected large numbers of wild birds, particularly water fowl, which can act as carriers of the virus.

Bird flu has since spread to Europe, Africa and South Asia, killing at least 148 people worldwide since late 2003, when the virus resurfaced in Southeast Asia.

China has admitted to holes in its bird flu prevention strategy, ranging from faulty vaccines to ignorance in its vast countryside, where most of the country's 1.3 billion people live.

This week, the official Xinhua news agency reported on a survey by the Chinese Health Education Association that said only 8 percent of respondents viewed flu of any kind as being a "serious infectious disease".

Almost a quarter of those polled had no idea flu outbreaks had to be reported to government authorities.

The government has vowed to punish local officials who cover up bird flu outbreaks, after being strongly criticised by the international community for initially covering up the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome that broke out in 2002.

Scientists fear the bird flu virus could mutate into a form that could pass easily from person to person, sparking a global pandemic.

With the world's biggest poultry population and millions of backyard birds roaming free, China is at the centre of the fight against bird flu.

There have been 21 human cases, including 14 deaths, from the virus in China and dozens of outbreaks in birds that have led to the culling of millions of fowl.

- Source: Reuters

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Thailand to launch bird flu educational campaign

6 October 2006



BANGKOK - Thailand will next week launch a bird flu educational campaign at schools nationwide to instruct children in basic prevention techniques such as hand-washing, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) announced on Friday.

'The campaign will cover all 40,000 elementary and secondary schools in the country and will focus on promoting frequent hand washing, rapid reporting of dead poultry to authorities and other key behaviours needed to prevent the spread of the H5N1 virus that causes bird flu,' said UNICEF's Thailand office which is assisting the programme.

Kasama Voravand, Permanent Secretary and Interim Minister of Education will launch the bird flu awareness and prevention campaign on Tuesday.

The ministry will also distribute 300,000 bars of soap as part of the campaign. Altogether 17 people, including 11 children, have died of bird flu in Thailand since the first confirmed human H5N1 case was recorded in early 2004.



Since 2003, the H5N1 virus is known to have infected more than 250 people in 10 countries worldwide, killing 148. Almost all cases of H5N1 infection in humans have been linked to close contact with sick or dead birds.

- Source: DPA

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Final tests confirm bird flu strain in Montana:USDA

Sat Oct 7, 2006



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A final round of tests on wild ducks in Montana confirmed the birds tested positive for the low-pathogenic H5 avian influenza virus, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior said on Saturday.

U.S. officials said the low pathogenic H5N3 avian influenza virus was found in two of the 16 samples collected from wild pintail ducks in Cascade County, Montana, in the west central part of the state.

Earlier tests released on September 21 had indicated the H5 and N1 subtypes in the bird samples.

"Because these rapid screening tests are highly sensitive, it is not uncommon to have positive results for a specific subtype on the initial screen test and yet not be able to isolate a virus of that subtype" through additional tests, the departments said in a statement.

The low-pathogenic avian influenza virus commonly occurs in nature, but usually results in minor sickness or no noticeable disease for birds. Low-pathogenic H5N1 has been confirmed in the United States this year including in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

- Source: Reuters

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China warns of bird flu outbreaks

Updated: 2006-10-08 07:05

BEIJING - China has reportedly asked local authorities to be on guard against a resurgence of bird flu with the onset of the autumn migration season.

"Autumn and winter are the prime period for bird flu outbreaks," said Yin Chengjie, vice-minister of agriculture, told the official Xinhua news agency, adding that officials "should not underestimate the difficulties in virus control."

Yin said Thursday the situation in China remained serious and warned there was still much to be done to prevent the spread of the virus, as the annual migration risked sparking new outbreaks.

On Wednesday, China's health ministry announced that a new outbreak of bird flu had killed about 1,000 poultry in northern China, the second such case in a week.

Twenty-one people in China have contracted bird flu and 14 of them have died, according to official figures. The most recent fatality occurred in July in the western region of Xinjiang.



More than 220 people have contracted the virus in Asia since the end of 2003 and 139 have died.

China confirmed in August that its first human bird flu victim died in late 2003, two years earlier than previously reported.

- Source: AFP

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No new bird flu outbreaks reported over ten months in Vietnam

October 9, 2006

Vietnam's bid to prevent the reoccurrence of avian influenza has shown progress, as no new outbreaks of bird flu had been reported nationwide since the last December.

According to a report dated October 8 by the Veterinary Department to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), 40 out of 64 cities and provinces throughout the country had provided second vaccinations in 2006 to nearly 70 million poultry.

The department requested local authorities throughout the country to reinforce measures to prevent bird flu from returning, particularly their task to monitor raising poultry at household farms.

The department also asked localities nationwide to halt the incubation of waterfowls and quails until the end of February 2007. (VNA)

- Source: Nhan Dan - Hanoi, Vietnam

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Bird flu preparedness exercise to begin tomorrow in Cyprus

October 9, 2006



A NATIONAL bird flu preparedness exercise starting tomorrow will give local services a practice run of how to react in the face of a real avian influenza outbreak, Agriculture Minister Photis Photiou said yesterday.

The exercise, which will last for several days, highlights the fact that "the danger of bird flu has not subsided", the minister said.

Speaking to reporters at the DIKO extraordinary party congress Photiou said EU Agriculture Ministers the topic of avian influenza and its dangers came up at every meeting, particularly during this period when the bird migration season begins.

"So we are going ahead with a prevention policy and this exercise will be carried out to see just how prepared we are," the minister said, noting that a number of private and public sector services would take part in the exercise.

According to reports the exercise has been organised by the veterinary services and will end on Thursday.

The simulation exercise involves a staged bird flu outbreak at an Ayia Varvara chicken farm in the Nicosia district which quickly spreads to other districts. The aim of the exercise is to see how quickly and efficiently each service reacts and brings the situation under control.



A group of Turkish Cypriot veterinary officials as well as United Nations doctors are expected to participate in the exercise.

EU Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner Markos Kyprianou said bird flu and a possible pandemic was a matter that concerned the EU and member states, and that although the matter was under control, it was important "not to forget that the danger always exists".

Kyprianou said preparedness exercises at community and national level were carried out to determine what mistakes were made and to correct any weaknesses.

He added that it was important to be prepared and to try out national plans.

"Cyprus has a good level of preparedness and readiness, but you must realise that there is no point where you say 'we're finished'," he said.

He explained that there was always room for improvement and adjustments, especially as new data and scientific facts emerged.

"That's why Cyprus, although ready, is continuing its efforts to improve its preparedness plans," Kyprianou said.

- Source: *Cyprus Mail 2006* - By Alexia Saoulli

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Bird flu found in pigs in Indonesia's Bali

09 Oct 2006 09:49:28 GMT



JAKARTA, Oct 9 (Reuters) - The H5N1 bird flu virus has infected pigs on the Indonesian resort island of Bali, a senior agriculture ministry official said on Monday.

"There were two pigs that were infected by bird flu in Bali. These were old cases that happened last July," Musni Suatmodjo, agriculture ministry director of animal health, told Reuters.

Koran Tempo newspaper had reported on the weekend that a team from the veterinary faculty at Udayana University had discovered avian influenza infected two pigs in the regencies of Gianyar and Tabanan in Bali.

It was not clear if the pigs died.

Pigs are a concern because they are susceptible to many of the viruses that infect humans. Swines can act as mixing vessels in which genetic material from avian flu viruses can mix with human influenza viruses, potentially producing new and deadly strains for which humans have no immunity.

I Gusti Putu Suwandi, head of the Tabanan agriculture office, said there have not been new cases of avian influenza in the area since July.

"As for the pigs' cases, we haven't received a formal report of the finding from the university," Suwandi told Reuters by telephone.

The agriculture ministry's Suatmodjo said bird flu had been detected in 30 out of 33 provinces in the country, with the latest cases in North Sulawesi province.



He said that although that was an increase from 29 provinces last year, the percentage of deaths in poultry was lower thanks to better vaccination and other control measures.

"The number of death cases in poultry due to bird flu were relatively small as commercial farms have done proper vaccination and biosecurity, but the main problems remain on the backyard farms," Suatmodjo said, referring to the many Indonesians who keep a handful of chickens at their homes.

Indonesia has become one of the frontlines in the battle against the disease. So far, 52 people have died of bird flu, the highest of any country, with the majority of deaths occurring since the beginning of this year.

Worldwide, 148 people have died of bird flu since 2003.

Although the human death toll has climbed, the Indonesian government has resisted mass culling of birds, citing the expense and impracticality in a huge, populous country where keeping a few chickens or ducks in backyards is common.

Culling at selective farms and their immediate surroundings has been the preferred method.

Millions of chickens and other fowl in Indonesia have died from the disease or been killed to prevent its spread since it first surfaced in the archipelago in late 2003.

- Source: Reuters

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Chula researchers find speedy test for bird flu

Tue Oct 10, 2006 6:36pm ET



Chulalongkorn University (Thailand) has successfully developed a new testing method for fast and accurate detection of bird flu resistance to the anti-viral drug oseltamivir, currently the best defence against the lethal virus.

The testing technique was capable of detecting any sub-types of the H5N1 strain, said Professor Yong Poovorawan, of Chulalongkorn's Faculty of Medicine, who led the development team.

"This means it could be used anywhere in the world to see if the virus is resistant to oseltamivir or not, and in time to save patients' lives," he said.

Moreover, the testing technique was also developed to be used with a conventional biomolecular testing laboratory in areas where the advanced type was not available.

It had been found that a significant difference between the H5N1 virus, which was oseltamivir resistant, was the change of amino acid at position 274 of the N1 subtype, Yong said.

The new testing method was developed based on this finding, using both Real-Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) and Conventional PCR. The former takes between two to four hours to know the results, whereas the latter takes approximately eight hours to tell whether the virus is resistant to the drug or not.



Chulalongkorn researchers had tested the technique on both human and animal specimens and whether both were resistant to oseltamivir. The human specimen of the world's first case of oseltamivir resistance in Vietnam was taken for testing in Thailand.

In October last year, a 14-year-old Vietnamese girl infected with the bird flu virus become the first patient to show resistance to oseltamivir when laboratory tests showed the drug had failed to combat the virus in her body.

In December last year, Vietnam detected oseltamivir resistance in three out of eight patients, said Yong, adding the patients died as a result of doctors discovering too late that the virus could outsmart the anti-viral Tamiflu - or oseltamivir.

"That inspired us to begin studying and to develop a sophisticated testing technique that gives the results fast enough for doctors to save patients' lives," Yong said.

The only substitute for oseltamivir is Zanamivir, which is not as convenient to use as it can only be administered through the nostrils or via intravenous injection, unlike oseltamivir, which is taken orally.

The study results prove the accuracy and efficiency of the drug resistance test. The test using RT-PCR is expected to appear in the Journal of Virological Methods next week and the test using Conventional PCR in Emerging Infectious Diseases in December.

The mortality rate of bird flu in humans was as high as 60 per cent, Yong said.

In Thailand, the Public Health Ministry has plans to stockpile 100 tablets of oseltamivir, which could be useless if the virus became resistant to the drug, he said.

Yong said the resistance factor had yet to be detected. However, this did not mean it did not exist. "The more the drug is used, the higher the chance of the virus becoming resistant to it," he said.

- Source: *The Nation*, by Arthit Khwankhom

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Egypt detects new human H5N1 bird flu case

Tue Oct 10, 2006 6:36pm ET

CAIRO (Reuters) - Authorities have detected Egypt's first human case of the highly pathogenic H5N1 bird flu virus since May, a World Health Organization official said on Tuesday.

Hassan el-Bushra, regional adviser for communicable diseases surveillance at the World Health Organization, said the woman had tested positive for the avian influenza virus in tests carried out by Egyptian health authorities.

Hanan Aboul Magd, 39, has been in hospital since October 4 and has been treated with the drug Tamiflu. Her condition was stable, state news agency MENA reported.

Egypt has had the largest cluster of human bird flu cases outside Asia, and the fresh case came a month after authorities found a number of new cases in birds following a two-month lull in detected poultry cases.

The new infection brings the number of human cases in Egypt to 15, of whom six have died. All the previous infections were detected between March and May after the virus first surfaced in Egyptian poultry in February.

- Source: *Reuters - USA*

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