

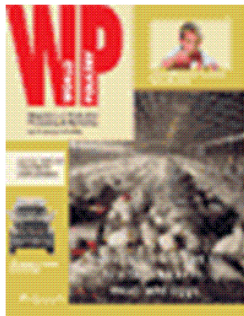


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Ten Canadians die after taking bird flu vaccine

01 December 2006



Following reports that patients taking Tamiflu can exhibit dangerous behaviour, news has surfaced that ten Canadians have died and at least 74 had adverse reactions after taking the flu drug.

Health Canada has been criticized for not issuing a public update about the drug sooner.

Reportedly, the public update eventually came more than two weeks after international warnings were posted of adverse reactions to the medication among children and youth.

The product's prescribing guidelines now indicate that taking the drug can lead to strange behaviours, including hallucinations, delirium and self-injury.

Among those taking the drug who have exhibited dangerous behaviour, there have been 25 reported deaths around the world in the most recent one-year period.

Health Canada said it has "not received any such reports" of abnormal behaviour among young people in Canada.

But it has asked Tamiflu's producer, Roche , to include updated information about possible adverse reactions on its Canadian labels.

The US Food and Drug Administration and Roche issued a warning about the drug on November 13.

Auditor-General Sheila Fraser's report released Tuesday included criticism that Health Canada doesn't issue timely and accurate health warnings to the public on a variety of issues.

Health Canada representatives said mismanagement and insufficient funds in a variety of areas, including drug programmes, could jeopardise public health and safety.

-WorldPoultry.net - Doetinchem, Netherlands



EU extends import ban on captive birds to end-March

01 December 2006

European Union veterinary experts on Friday extended a ban on all imports of captive live birds from outside the bloc for a further three months to guard against the spread of bird flu, the European Commission said.

The ban would now remain in force until March 31, 2007.

"Originally, the Commission had not intended to extend this ban. Instead, it had intended to amend the entire set of provisions for captive bird imports, including quarantine requirements," it said in a statement.

The Commission, the EU's executive arm, said it needed more time to assess an opinion delivered last month by the EU's leading food safety agency EFSA on the animal health and welfare risks associated with live bird imports.

Once it had done so, new measures would be proposed for regulating EU imports of captive birds, the statement said.

"The aim is to put forward a proposal on these measures in early 2007. Given the global avian influenza situation, it was deemed necessary to keep the current import ban in place until these new protection measures are in place," it said.

Earlier this week, the veterinary experts agreed to prolong a similar ban for imports of pet birds until the end of 2007.

Bird flu, which originated in Asia, remains essentially an animal disease but has infected nearly 260 people worldwide since late 2003, killing more than 150, according to the World Health Organisation.

Experts say the danger is that the virus will evolve and spark a pandemic that could kill millions of people.

-Source: Reuters

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China promises speedy bird flu sample sharing

02 Dec 2006 04:09:52 GMT

HONG KONG, Dec 2 (Reuters) - China has promised the new head of the World Health Organisation that it will share bird flu samples more quickly, after worries Chinese secrecy was hampering understanding of the virus, Hong Kong papers said on Saturday.

Chinese bird flu expert Margaret Chan, who was elected in November as head of the WHO, has just finished a four-day visit to China where she met President Hu Jintao as well as Premier Wen Jiabao and Health Minister Gao Qiang.

"I can frankly tell you President Hu, Premier Wen and the Ministry of Health all understand the importance of making speedy announcements," the Standard quoted Chan as saying.

"China has already put in a lot of resources in improving its notification system for communicable diseases," she added.



Chan has vowed to speak out if countries, including China, failed to strengthen surveillance against dangerous diseases, including bird flu, or proved reluctant to share the virus samples needed to help develop vaccines.

Experts fear the H5N1 bird flu virus could kill millions of people if it were to mutate into a version that could spread efficiently among humans.

Last month, China agreed to share long-sought bird flu virus samples from 2004 and 2005 to support global efforts to prevent a flu pandemic. The WHO has said its understanding had been hampered by China's refusal to share bird flu samples.

China recently rejected findings in a paper published by Hong Kong and U.S. scientists that they had detected a new strain of H5N1 virus in the southern Chinese province of Fujian last year.

-Source: Reuters

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Bird-Flu Fight to Cost \$750 Mln a Year, UN Envoy Says

December 04, 2006

The global fight against bird flu needs as much as \$750 million extra a year to stem its spread and prepare for any pandemic it spawns, the United Nations said.

Outbreaks of the lethal H5N1 avian flu virus, which is constantly changing and may mutate to be easily transmissible between humans, could spark the next flu pandemic, David Nabarro, the UN's pandemic-flu coordinator, said in an e-mail.

Between \$500 million and \$750 million a year is needed to fund efforts to monitor, manage and eradicate the virus and to bring animal and human health services to the standards sought by the World Organization for Animal Health and World Health Organization.

"Sustained financial provision will be necessary," Nabarro said. "Humankind may have to live for years with the possibility that H5N1 will become the cause of the next influenza pandemic -- unless we develop the capacity to predict how this might happen and, better still, to neutralize it."

Disease trackers, health officials and representatives from aid agencies will meet in Bamako, the capital of West African nation of Mali, this week to raise more funds and discuss ways to improve pandemic preparations.

The H5N1 virus is known to have infected 258 people in 10 countries, killing 154 of them, since 2003, according to the Geneva-based WHO. Millions could die if it becomes as contagious as seasonal flu.

More Pledges Sought

The international community will be asked to pledge between \$1.31 billion and \$1.58 billion in Bamako on Dec. 8 to fund activities for the next two to three years, Nabarro said. About a third of the extra financing is required in Africa, and UN agencies and partners need between \$200 million and \$300 million in 2007, he said.

In January, almost \$1.9 billion was pledged by donors at a conference in Beijing. Since then, the H5N1 avian influenza virus has infected animals in 38 new countries, resulting in human cases in four nations.

"The virus has spread further, and now has appeared in 55 countries on every continent of the eastern hemisphere, killing an estimated 250 million poultry, and highlighting the increasing challenge in



controlling the virus and the urgency to act immediately to prevent further spreading of the disease," the World Bank said in a draft report dated Nov. 30.

The largest increases in needs are in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, the Washington-based organization said. The H5N1 virus was found in poultry in Nigeria in February, and was later found in Niger, Egypt, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Djibouti.

Africa's Needs

"The African continent is much weaker economically and less structurally able to respond to the avian and human influenza threat, so effective implementation of integrated country programs will require significant grant funding," the World Bank said.

At least \$200 million will be needed annually to address poultry outbreaks in Indonesia and to prevent a further spread to other countries in the region and beyond, and to reduce the risk of a human pandemic, it said.

More than half the 76 fatalities recorded this year have occurred in Indonesia, where the virus is reported to have killed about one person a month since January. H5N1 has been found in 30 of Indonesia's 33 provinces. The country needs assistance to speed poultry vaccination and to help fund compensation programs for farmers whose poultry were culled, the government's committee on avian and pandemic flu said in August.

"Compensation programs work best when you have them in place before disease breaks out, which can be difficult to do in poor countries where the extra finances and the expertise needed for fair and rapid payments to farmers and other poultry owners may be in short supply," Chris Delgado, a World Bank adviser on rural development, said in an e-mail.

Pandemic Virus

A pandemic can start when a novel influenza A-type virus, to which almost no one has natural immunity, emerges and begins spreading. Experts believe that a pandemic in 1918, which may have killed as many as 50 million people, began when an avian flu virus jumped to people from birds.

A severe pandemic, similar to the one in 1918, may cause global economic losses of as much as \$1.8 trillion, according to World Bank estimates.

-By Vesna Poljak

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US CDC contracts for new, faster bird flu tests

December 04, 2006



The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Monday it had awarded \$11.4 million for developing new, quick tests for influenza to four U.S. companies.

The idea is to come up with reliable, on-the-spot tests for H5N1 avian influenza, the CDC said in a statement.

Current quick tests can tell if a person is infected with influenza A or B, but they do not identify the strain and reports suggest the tests miss influenza in patients infected with H5N1.

The companies are: Sunnyvale, California based Cepheid <CPHD.O>, which got \$2.4 million; San Diego-based Nanogen <NGEN.O>, which won \$4.5 million; Marlborough, Massachusetts-based Iqum,



which got \$3.8 million and Gaithersburg, Maryland-based MesoScale, which won \$706,000, the CDC said in a statement.

"The tests could provide public health experts worldwide with critical information on the influenza viruses circulating and help monitor for viruses that could cause a global influenza pandemic," the CDC said.

"During the next year, the four companies will work to create tests that would detect seasonal human influenza viruses and differentiate influenza A H5N1 from seasonal human influenza viruses within 30 minutes."

"Because influenza viruses are constantly changing, the tests would also need to be quickly adapted if the virus mutates over time or if new viruses emerge that have the potential to cause a pandemic." The CDC said it hoped to help the companies win Food and Drug Administration approval within two to three years.

"We have seen avian influenza infections since 1997 but we unfortunately still do not have a good way to quickly and easily distinguish at a patient's bedside whether they suffer from H5N1 or a more common type of influenza," said CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding.

"These contracts will support development of promising technology that could help doctors treat their patients faster and help public health authorities track influenza viruses that could spur a pandemic."

Currently, to test for H5N1, samples from the patient must be sent a specialized testing lab, which can sometimes take more than a week. This would be too slow to stop the spread of a pandemic, experts say.

While the H5N1 avian flu virus mostly affects birds, it has infected 258 people and killed 154. Experts say it could evolve into a pandemic strain that infects people easily if it acquires the ability to pass easily from one person to another.

-Source: Reuters

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When to use bird flu vaccine a "tricky issue"

06 December 2006

A vaccine against the killer H5N1 bird flu virus could be licensed for human use in a year, but when to use it is becoming a "tricky issue", a senior World Health Organisation official said on Wednesday.

Drug companies are racing to find a cure for the avian influenza virus which has killed 154 people since 2003 and fanned fears of a global human pandemic. At least a dozen manufacturers have clinical trials underway or planned. "We can expect that a year from now there would be vaccines against H5N1 influenza strains that would be licensed for human use," Marie-Paule Kieny, head of the WHO's Initiative for Vaccine Research, told reporters on the final day of a WHO vaccine conference in Bangkok.

Health experts say vaccines work well when they match the circulating strain of flu.

The H5N1 strain has not evolved yet into a form that passes easily between humans, but studies suggest some vaccines might help protect people from death if a pandemic strain does emerge.

Several countries have ordered or are negotiating to stockpile pre-pandemic H5N1 vaccines, which some experts recommend to immunise health care workers, firefighters and other essential staff before a pandemic breaks out.



David Salisbury, director of immunisation at Britain's Department of Health, told the conference it would take 4-6 months for the first vaccine doses to emerge from factories, and up to a year to produce enough for the recommended two doses.

"During this time, at least the first pandemic wave will be over, and the second and third waves, should they occur, may also be over before significant numbers of individuals can be vaccinated," he said.

Salisbury said some data on vaccines had shown that "even if poorly matched against the pandemic strain, they may play a valuable role in minimising disease, reducing transmission and even aborting a pandemic".

PRODUCTION PROBLEMS

Kieny said the WHO did not yet have an official position on pre-pandemic vaccination, which she called a "tricky issue".

"We need to take into consideration that immunising part of your population, especially groups on the front line to combat the pandemic, might be a good benefit," she said.

"But you have to weigh that against the risk of immunising against a pandemic that is not there," she said, referring to the 1976 swine flu scare in the United States.

That year, millions of Americans were vaccinated against swine flu after an outbreak at a U.S army base triggered fears of a wider pandemic. It never occurred and the vaccine was blamed for a rise in cases of a rare neurological illness. WHO officials said several projects were now underway to boost production capacity for vaccines to protect against bird flu and other viruses with pandemic potential.

The U.N. health agency launched a plan in October to increase global flu vaccine capacity, which is expected to rise to 780 million doses by 2009 under current expansion plans, still far short of what would be needed to fight a global pandemic.

The strategy calls on governments to increase normal flu vaccination campaigns to encourage companies to raise capacity.

Drug makers could also be paid to keep capacity idle for pandemic vaccines. It also urges study of more potent vaccines to reduce the number of recommended doses to one from two.

The plan could cost \$3-\$10 billion over the next decade.

"None of these strategies will be able to fill the gap in the immediate short term but, starting now, first results may be seen in three to five years," the WHO's Alejandro Costa said.

-Source: Reuters

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More on the Mali conference

December 06, 2006



Via Reuters, a report on the latest H5N1 conference, this one held in Bamako, Mali: Bird flu experts meet to fight virus, complacency. Excerpt:

Experts fighting bird flu around the world met on Wednesday to replenish their war chest and plot the next stage of their campaign to control the disease and avert a devastating human flu pandemic.

The three-day meeting in Mali, the fourth global bird flu summit since



late last year, includes a donor conference on Friday aiming to secure an extra \$1.2 billion to \$1.5 billion over 2-3 years to add to \$1.9 billion pledged in Beijing last January. But the meeting began with a warning that complacency threatened to undermine international efforts against bird flu.

"Technical experts are sometimes accused of having overestimated the risks from this disease, or of exaggerating its potential threat," Modibo Traore, head of the African Union's InterAfrican Bureau for Animal Resources, told the opening session.

"The rampant demotivation that has resulted seems to have affected the main players in the struggle on all continents, and notably the donor community," Traore said.

I'm a little surprised by Mr. Traore's comments. In my own surveys of H5N1 discussions, it's the absence of skepticism, not its heavy influence, that's notable. One or two people have gained reputations as flu skeptics, but their arguments seem flimsy and politicians rarely if ever cite them.

The "donor community" of governments is certainly demotivated, but not because skeptics are so persuasive. It's very easy to pledge another billion or two at a conference, and thereby gain media attention and a few political points back home. It's far harder to go home and write the promised cheque.

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World Bank Says \$1.5 Billion More Needed for Bird Flu Battle

06 December 2006



Women clean chickens to prepare them for a local hotel in an outdoor market in Bamako, Mali

Bird flu experts from 100 countries are calling for much more to be done to prevent the disease from spreading in Africa. Jordan Davis reports from VOA's West Africa bureau the experts are meeting in Bamako, Mali.

The World Bank is calling for an additional \$1.5 billion to fight avian flu. One-third of the funds are to be directed to sub-Saharan Africa during the next few years.

This year \$96 million has been spent on bird flu prevention in Africa.

The H5N1 virus has been detected in eight countries on the continent since February and African Union officials announced during the conference that new outbreaks are still occurring in Nigeria, Egypt and Sudan.

Alex Thiermann of the Paris-based World Organization for Animal Health says many African countries need to strengthen their veterinary infrastructure.

"We should focus and concentrate our resources into fighting it in poultry so that does not threaten other countries and minimize the chance it becomes a pandemic threat," he said.

Many experts are concerned the virus might mutate into a form more easily spread among humans.

The World Health Organization says the disease has killed at least 154 people worldwide since it first appeared in Asia in 2003.



The H5N1 virus has had a severe impact on poultry farmers. One of the main methods for preventing the spread of infection is killing birds that have been exposed.

The World Bank estimates 250,000 birds have been killed worldwide either by the disease or as a preventative measure.

By Jordan Davis

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South Korea culls 771,000 birds over new flu outbreak

Thursday, December 07, 2006

H5N1 has been associated with death in many mammalian species commonly kept as pets including, dogs, cats, pigs and ferrets.



SEOUL: South Korea has culled some 771,000 chickens since it reported two new bird flu outbreaks in its southwest late last month, a local government said on Sunday.

The mass culling began after the flu hit a poultry farm at Iksan, 230 kilometers (140 miles) southwest of Seoul, on November 22 before spreading to a second farm nearby two days later.

The Iksan city government said in a statement the number of poultry slaughtered totaled some 771,000 as of Sunday, after a military-backed quarantine in the areas around the disease-hit farms.

Prime Minister Han Myeong-Sook visited Iksan Sunday and expressed satisfaction at the mass culling and other quarantine measure taken by local governments against the avian flu, local news agency said.

-From the PetPeoplesPlace.com Editors

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