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Rwanda tests out Mobile Health System

Wednesday 19 October 2006



Mobiles to track bird flu and Aids spread: Doctors tracking the spread of HIV and bird flu have a new tool to help in the fight against such deadly diseases - the humble mobile phone.

Medics in Rwanda have trialled a new application that lets medical and government staff report data - disease outbreaks, drug inventory levels, patient treatment status - back to a central database using a mobile.

In Rwanda, the system, created by the GSM Association and vendor Voxiva, is used to keep tabs on the health infrastructure and has replaced the old paper and pen input. As well as sending information, doctors will be able to order medicine using their handsets.

All requests and data are sent over Rwanda's mobile network on GPRS where available. In areas with no GPRS coverage the system will drop back to sending data over SMS.

Now it's hoped the system will be deployed across the whole of Rwanda as well as other African countries including Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania.

Indonesia has already signed up to test the Java app from next month, which is aiming to tackle potential bird flu pandemics.

- Source: Silicon.com - UK, By Jo Best

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UN praises Cambodia for tackling bird flu

19-Oct-2006

The United Nations has praised Cambodia for its rapid action in preventing the spread of bird flu, which has killed six people in the kingdom.



"Rapid action was taken by community groups with the support of government and international organizations and this was a very excellent piece of work by all concerns," said David Nabarro, the UN's senior coordinator on avian influenza, on Thursday.

The top bird flu official spent a day in Cambodia, where he reviewed efforts by the government and the United Nations children's agency to educate school children and teachers on detecting and preventing the deadly disease.

Cambodia has been hit by four bird flu outbreaks in the last two months, and six people have died from the H5N1 strain of the virus since 2003. The last death was in April this year.

This compares to 17 fatalities in neighbouring Thailand and 55 in Indonesia since the latest bird flu outbreak erupted in late 2003.

"The threat posed by avian influenza remains serious for the world as a whole," said Nabarro, who will visit Thailand Friday as part of a tour to review the bird flu situation in the region.

"Avian influenza remains a major threat to the world poultry, the virus is continuing to circulate in domestic poultry population in Asia, in Africa and in eastern Europe," he said.

Bird flu has killed more than 100 people worldwide since 2003, mostly in Asia, according to the World - Source: Health Organization. — AFP

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OIE chief urges world bird flu compensation fund

19 Oct 2006



PARIS, Oct 19 (Reuters) - The head of the World Animal Health body OIE said on Thursday an international fund to compensate farmers in poor countries for bird flu culls was urgently needed to ensure reporting of the deadly virus.

Officials from the OIE, World Bank, European Commission and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) met in Paris this week with the aim of setting up a fund by early next year.

"We'd like to convince the international financial institutions to have a world fund reserved for animal health emergencies," OIE Director General Bernard Vallat said.

"Once a crisis erupts in a developing country, it's very rare there are funds available for compensation, which costs a lot of money," he told Reuters.

Experts believe there has been significant under-reporting of the H5N1 bird flu virus in poultry in parts of Asia and Africa, largely because farmers fear heavy losses if they notify the authorities and are then forced into widespread culling.

"If there is not an absolute guarantee that the farmer will be reimbursed in a fair, equitable and rapid way, there is a tendency towards very dangerous behaviour," Vallat said, adding this could mean selling birds on at local open-air markets.

"This could be a powerful vector in circulating the virus."



H5N1 still mainly affects birds, but has killed more than 150 people in nine countries. It re-surfaced in Asia in 2003 and has since spread to Europe and Africa.

The World Health Organization believes H5N1 could be the most likely cause of the next flu pandemic if it mutates into a form that could be easily passed among humans.

The World Bank has estimated that a severe flu pandemic could cost the global economy up to \$2 trillion.

The OIE says the best way to prevent such a pandemic is by tackling the virus at source by stamping out the disease as quickly as possible in the bird population.

It also says this saves money.

"It's essential that declarations are made rapidly because the hours count in these situations. Without early detection and a rapid response, the spread becomes exponential, and the costs become extremely heavy," Vallat said.

While outbreaks of the virus in Europe have proved relatively short-lived due to tight veterinary controls, H5N1 has become endemic in parts of Asia and Africa, where government budgets in dealing with such crises are severely limited.

Vallat said it took around 18 months for the international community to react properly to the emergence of H5N1 in Asia.

"And that's why the disease spread to Europe and Africa. We need a world fund that can act immediately," he said.

Vallat said it was too early say how much money would be needed. He said officials were now working on more detailed economic assessment of needs and this would be discussed at a major bird flu conference in Mali in early December.

- Source: Reuters, By David Evans

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Studying the virulence of bird flu in humans

19 Oct 2006

New research has shown that the H5N1 avian influenza virus replicates much more aggressively in humans than other types of human influenza viruses, which means that quick diagnosis and treatment is vital to preventing fatalities from the disease.

The H5N1 avian influenza virus creates high viral levels that set off an overwhelming inflammatory response. This helps explain the infection's virulence, according to researchers M de Jong and others, who published their findings in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Researchers at the Oxford University Clinical Research Unit at the Hospital for Tropical Disease in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, studied 18 patients infected with H5N1 influenza and eight patients with two types of human influenza.

H5N1 patients had much higher levels of virus in their throats than other patients. Also, levels of some inflammatory cytokines and chemokines were correlated with viral load and were highest in the patients who died. One cytokine, interleukin 8, is produced by bronchial epithelial cells and may play a role in acute respiratory distress syndrome.



"Our observations indicate that high viral load, and the resulting intense inflammatory responses, are central to influenza H5N1 pathogenesis," the researchers said, noting that clinicians should focus on preventing this intense cytokine response by early diagnosis and antiviral treatment.

- Source: worldpoultry.net

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Kenya on alert with bird flu next door

20 Oct 2006



A recent outbreak of the H5N1 avian influenza virus in southern Sudan has prompted Kenyan authorities to issue a bird flu alert, banning poultry imports from Sudan and other affected countries.

Nicholas Muraguri of the ministry of health said extra teams of health workers and veterinarians were testing people and poultry for bird flu in the Turkana and Lokichoggio districts which border southern Sudan.

"Apart from surveillance, Kenya has banned poultry and poultry products imports from Sudan and other affected countries as a preventive measure against the bird flu," Muraguli told the Xinhua News Agency.

Officials say Kenya and other east African countries are at risk because infected birds are migrating to the region from Europe to escape the northern hemisphere winter.

Muraguli said Kenya has set up 11 centers in public hospitals where health workers are carrying out surveillance on patients suffering from flu-like illnesses.

"People should not touch, eat, sell or transport poultry or wild birds found dead. They should instead report such cases to the nearest veterinary or public health office," said Muraguli.

He said all tests carried out showed that there was no bird flu virus in Kenya and urged people to continue eating poultry, a staple protein source in rural Africa, without fear.

According to World Health Organisation statistics, bird flu has killed 151 people worldwide.

- Source: worldpoultry.net- Doetinchem, Netherlands

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Vical announces successful tests for bird flu vaccine

October 21, 2006



Vical shares rallied yesterday, after the San Diego biotechnology company said its proposed vaccine had provided 100 percent protection in ferrets against a lethal strain of H5N1 avian influenza virus.

The company also said that just a single dose of the vaccine was used, which could prove more efficient than a conventional two-dose regimen.

Though clinical trials in humans must be completed before the proposed vaccine could be marketed, investors pushed Vical's shares up 53 cents, or 10 percent, to close at \$5.88 yesterday on the Nasdaq



Stock Market. Trading volume exceeded 3 million shares, compared with average volume of less than 150,000 over the past three months.

Alan Engbring, executive director of investor relations for Vical, said the company hoped to begin human testing of the bird flu vaccine by next year, pending approval of the Food and Drug Administration.

World Health Organization officials say the H5N1 strain of avian flu poses a major world health threat. Earlier this month, the organization reported that of 256 individuals worldwide known to have been infected, 151 have died.

Vical's DNA vaccine candidate uses two influenza virus proteins plus the H5 avian influenza virus surface protein, and is formulated with the company's patented Vaxfectin adjuvant, which are agents that boost the immune system's response to a vaccine.

Engbring explained that the company's technology allows it to target the core of the flu virus, not just its surface.

"The fascinating thing is that the core doesn't change very much, while the surface is very much a moving target," he said.

John McCamant, editor of the Medical Technology Stock Letter, said ferrets have become the industry's standard animal model for early testing of flu vaccines.

But the analyst said he expected anti-viral treatments would be more readily accepted to deal with bird flu outbreaks than would any vaccines to prevent the infection.

"Anti-virals are given to patients with the flu, while vaccines are given to the uninfected," McCamant said. And the already infected, he said, would likely tolerate the greater risk of accepting a treatment than the uninfected.

McCamant noted further that the field of companies seeking to develop vaccines is crowded.

George Fulop, an analyst with Needham & Co, said that Vical's single-dose approach vaccine could prove more efficient in a flu outbreak. Needham has an investment banking relationship with Vical.

Earlier this week, Vical raised \$25 million through the sale of 5 million previously registered shares to Singapore-based Temasek Holdings at \$5.02 per share. The money will fund development of the flu vaccine.

Based in Sorrento Mesa, Vical employs about 150 people and is also attempting to develop vaccines for metastatic melanoma and other diseases.

- Source: San Diego Union Tribune - United States, By Craig D. Rose

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Poultry farmers in Thailand warned of bird flu after water declines

22 Oct 2006

The Director-General of the Department of Livestock Development ordered provincial livestock officials in flood-hit areas to spray disinfectants after water declines at the end of November to prevent bird flu outbreak.

Livestock Development Department Director-General Yukol Limlaemthong led a team to visit and distribute animal feed to farmers of Tambon Tumplee, in the central district of Ayutthaya. 80% of the



farmers are Thai-Muslims raising breeding cows and goats for export. During floods, they have moved over 2,000 heads of their cattle to a space behind earthen dykes along the Ayutthaya-Angthong road.



The Director-General said that floods have affected most of the farm animals in the North, the central region, and the Northeast. 56,308 farmers and 2.7 million animals have been affected, 2.4 million of which are poultry. The Livestock Development Department has provided them with 1,000 tonnes of dried grass and prepared another 1,000 tonnes to be distributed more in the central region. Another 1,000 tonnes have been reserved for the South.

Mr Yukol also ordered all livestock development officials in the provinces to send mobile medical units to inundated areas and to draw up a zoning identifying high places where farmers can evacuate their animals if flood occurs again in the future. Veterinarians will be called to take care of their animals immediately.

However, the most worrying problem after water has declined is the return of bird flu since then winter has already come and the inundation areas are the same areas where bird flu spread last year. As a result, Mr Yukol called for collaborations from residents and all poultry farmers to clean their farms by spraying disinfectants after flood water has reduced.

- Source: *ThaisNews - Bangkok, Thailand*

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TANZANIA: Zanzibar destroys more eggs to keep bird flu at bay

24 Oct 2006



STONE TOWN, 24 October (IRIN) - Authorities in Zanzibar have incinerated another consignment of chicken eggs smuggled from mainland Tanzania, in the hope of keeping their islands free of avian flu.

"We seized the egg consignment of about 11 boxes imported from the Tanzanian mainland commercial capital of Dar es Salaam," said Kassim Gharib, the head of a task force formed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Natural Resources and Environment.

The task force was established to ensure that bird flu does not spread to Zanzibar, two semi-autonomous islands that form part of the Republic of Tanzania.

The consignment was seized after the importers disappeared, apparently fearing arrest, Gharib said on Tuesday. Gharib said the Zanzibari business community had continued to import poultry products despite a ban on them introduced in 2005.

According to the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO), the H5N1 avian influenza virus can be found inside eggs, and on the surface of eggs laid by infected birds.

There is, however, no epidemiological evidence to suggest that people have been infected with avian influenza through eating eggs or egg products. Thorough cooking of eggs can inactivate the virus, according to WHO.



In August, Zanzibar's authorities incinerated 61,000 chicken eggs in a bid to check the threat of bird flu, but because of high demand during the Muslim Eid al-Fitr holidays this week, and the current high season for tourism in the islands, the price of eggs in Zanzibar has doubled.

The deadly H5N1 strain of avian flu has been found in several African countries. The poultry industry in Asia and in a few European countries has been affected by the disease, which has claimed dozens of human lives, mostly in Asia.

- Source: Reuters AlertNet - London, England, UK

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