

Poultry Surveillance Programme Results

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A Government spokesman confirmed today (July 6) that test conducted by the Agriculture and Fisheries Department found last night that one faecal sample taken from a dead chicken at Cheung Sha Wan Poultry Wholesale Market positive of H5 avian flu virus.

He pointed out that for H5 virus, there are a number of types with different virulence and not every type would affect human. Further analyses including gene sequencing is required to determine the specific type.

He stressed that during the period, there was no abnormal chicken deaths noted at both retail and wholesale markets and the chickens had not shown any clinical signs of sickness.

To safeguard public health, the Government has already put in place a comprehensive set of control measure including the implementation of a "rest day" every month.

The spokesman said that in the wake of the recent avian flu incident, the Government has enhanced the surveillance system on avian flu at all levels, including increasing the number of blood test at borders and wholesale markets, to make the surveillance programme extremely sensitive and effective.

"This will enable the Government to take appropriate follow-up actions once viruses are detected by the surveillance system," he said.

Under the enhanced surveillance system, the authorities take swabs from dead chickens at wholesale markets for testing.

He noted that after the resumption of trading of poultry,

all blood tests of chickens at import control points showed satisfactory results. There was no unusual chicken deaths at retail and wholesale markets. Neither have chickens shown clinical symptoms of sickness.

"It is a fact that avian flu exists in the natural environment. The set of comprehensive measures are not designed to achieve a virus-free environment," the spokesman said.

"Our aim is to detect the existence of the avian flu virus at an early stage to prevent it from re-assorting to a type that could affect human," he added.

"Our comprehensive set of surveillance and preventive programme covers all levels from farms and to retail markets. The purpose of introducing a 'Rest Day' for chickens every month is to break the virus cycle and prevent it from establishing in the market so as to protect public health."

"With the finding yesterday, we are now conducting further analyses on gene sequencing. In the meantime, we are also closely monitoring the health of chickens at wholesale and retail markets.

The spokesman stressed once again that not every H5 type of avian flu would affect humans and there was already in place in Hong Kong a comprehensive surveillance programme to safeguard public health.

"Members of the public are reminded to maintain proper personal hygiene. They should avoid direct contact with poultry faeces and clean their hands thoroughly after contact with poultry," he said.

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