

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Follow-up actions arising from the meeting on 27 May 2003

Purpose

At the meeting held on 27 May 2003, the Panel asked the Administration to provide information on –

- (a) the membership and the work of the Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene (ACFEH);
- (b) the measures taken by the Dutch Administration after the recent H7N7 avian influenza outbreak in the Netherlands; and
- (c) causes of death of the Dutch veterinarian who had been infected with the H7N7 avian influenza virus.

The relevant information and the progress of discussions with the Mainland authority about vaccinating Mainland live birds to be supplied to Hong Kong against H5 avian influenza are set out below.

Membership and terms of reference of ACFEH

2. The ACFEH was first set up in 2000 to advise the Government on food safety and environmental hygiene issues. A copy of the terms of reference of the ACFEH is at Annex A.

3. At present, the ACFEH comprises 15 non-official members (including the Chairman) and four ex-officio members. It has a well mix of members with experience and/or professional qualifications in different fields such as the medical profession, public health, veterinary science,

food science and trade, education, public relation, agriculture and fisheries and community services. The full membership list is at [Annex B](#).

H7N7 outbreak in the Netherlands

4. According to the information available to us, the Dutch authority implemented movement restriction and slaughtering of infected holdings to arrest the spread of the disease in their recent H7N7 avian influenza outbreak. They also established a 3 km surveillance zones around the infected areas where movement restriction applied but no slaughtering was practiced to help detect any spilling out from the infected areas. Since the disease broke out in February 2003, they have confirmed H7N7 infection in 241 holdings in 4 provinces and culled a total of 30.3 million birds. No new or suspected cases have been reported since June 2003.

5. Placement of sentinel birds in slaughtered farms has commenced on 24 June, and restocking is expected if these sentinel birds show no signs of disease in 3 weeks. Restriction in the surveillance zones will also be lifted when restocking starts.

6. The Dutch H7N7 avian flu virus was associated with causing conjunctivitis in some people who were actively involved in slaughtering operations. As a result, the Dutch Ministry of Public Health had advised strict hygiene measures, vaccination against human flu and preventive anti-viral drug for all those working in the infected and surveillance areas. The 57-year-old veterinarian who died in the outbreak had worked in infected farms without taking the medication. He died of severe pneumonia on 17 April after falling ill for 2 days. The flu virus found in him was identical to the circulating H7N7 virus. An independent inquiry is currently being held on the case.

Vaccination of imported birds against H5 avian influenza

7. At the meeting held on 27 May 2003, Members were informed that the Administration had started discussion with the Mainland authority on the new import control programme for H5 vaccinated birds. We have recently reached agreement with the Mainland authority on the

new programme which will apply to all imported live land-based food poultry.

8. As in previous practice, every consignment of Mainland birds supplied to Hong Kong must come from a registered farm and be accompanied by a health certificate issued by the concerned Inspection and Quarantine Bureau (CIQ) in the Mainland. Under the new import control programme, the health certificate should certify, amongst other things, that the birds in the consignment have been vaccinated with an approved H5 avian influenza vaccine in the Mainland and subject to testing showing that the birds have satisfactory antibody response. In addition, the health certificate should also certify that a group of sentinel birds (birds left unvaccinated) have been reared together with the birds in the consignment, and that the sentinel birds have been tested free of H5 antibody response.

9. When birds are imported to Hong Kong through Man Kam To, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will inspect the birds and verify the content of the accompanying health certificate. If sick or dead birds are found in a consignment of birds, samples will be collected from the sick or dead birds for screening test for H5 avian influenza virus. To complement, additional samples may also be drawn from clinically normal birds of randomly selected consignments for screening as well. If any screening test shows positive results, FEHD will take immediate follow-up actions with the relevant CIQ such as arranging repatriation of the concerned consignment to the Mainland.

10. As to the monitoring of the immunity status of imported birds, samples will be collected randomly at Man Kam To and Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Poultry Wholesale Market for testing of H5 antibody. If any farm is repeatedly found to supply birds that have unsatisfactory antibody response, the relevant CIQ will be asked to suspend the farm from exporting live birds to Hong Kong and investigate into the causes for poor vaccination response.

11. The Mainland has started to make arrangement for vaccinating live birds for the Hong Kong market. It is expected that vaccinated Mainland birds will be on the local market before the end of

this year. The need for continuous vaccination of imported Mainland birds will be reviewed in about two years' time.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
July 2003

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

Terms of Reference

- (a) To consider and advise on policies relating to food safety and environmental hygiene and to monitor their implementation;
- (b) To advise on regulatory standards relating to food quality and food composition;
- (c) To receive reports on the handling of major food incidents; and
- (d) To advise on community education programmes for promoting public understanding of food safety and public responsibility for environmental hygiene.

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

Membership

- Chairman : Professor YUEN Kwok-yung, JP
- Members : Mr CHAN Bing-woon, SBS, JP
Dr CHAN Hei-ling, Helen
Dr HO Dit-sang, John
Mr HUNG Hak-hip, Peter
Dr Anthony Edward JAMES
Professor KWAN Hoi-shan
Mr KWOK Chun-wah, Jimmy, MH
Mr LAI Tat-sang, David, MH
Ms LAM Wai-ling, Leona, JP
Mrs LAM WONG Pik-har, Grace
Mr LEE Luen-wai, John, JP
Dr LO King-shun
Dr the Hon LO Wing-lok, JP
Dr LUI Chiu-tong, Jacqueline
- Ex-officio Members : Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, with
Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food as
his alternate
Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
Director of Health