

The written response to the questions raised by Hon Fred Li about the incident of Hong Kong residents contracting H5N1

- 1. What is the incubation period of the H5N1? Can the Government conclude that the patients contracted the disease in Hong Kong or in the Mainland?**

Answer: The exact cause of death of the girl cannot be determined. Therefore, it is not possible to discuss the incubation period or the source of infection in this case. The deceased father was confirmed to have influenza AH5N1 infection. As he was outside Hong Kong during the normal incubation period of influenza, which is one to four days, we believe that he contracted the disease outside Hong Kong.

- 2. Has the Government extracted the nasopharyngeal aspirate of the members of the family concerned for testing? If yes, what is the result?**

Answer: Nasopharyngeal aspirate from the girl's grandfather, mother, brother and elder sister have been subjected to laboratory tests. The girl's brother was confirmed to have H5N1 infection and he has recovered. The girl's mother was confirmed to have parainfluenza infection and she has recovered also. The tests on the specimens from the grandfather and elder sister are so far negative. The grandfather had mild cough only and has recovered. The elder sister is free from any symptoms.

- 3. It is reported that, Mr. Ko was dispensed a prescription called Tamiflu, which was approved by the Department of Health in July 2000, to treat his flu. However, it appeared that the effect of the drug was not good. Will the Government liaise with the World Health Organization and consider the feasibility of developing a new drug?**

Answer: In the laboratory, H5N1 virus has been shown to be sensitive to amantadine and Tamiflu. In individual patients, the effectiveness of treatment depends on many other factors, such

as pre-existing medical conditions and the stage of the disease when the treatment is started. One cannot conclude that the drug is not effective based on a single case.

4. Is there any liaison channel between HK and the Mainland to handle incidents in which Hong Kong citizens had passed away in the Mainland due to communicable diseases?

Answer: There is legal requirement for application of permit before the corpse of a deceased person can be imported into Hong Kong, and the cause of death as certified on the death certificate should be provided in the application.

5. Will the Government consider setting up a working group with the health authorities in the Mainland to trace the source of the disease? If yes, what is the progress? If no, what is the reason?

Answer: We have good communication with the Mainland throughout the incident. The Mainland health authorities have been informed of the two cases of Influenza A H5N1 infection and they will decide on actions to be taken.

6. The Government has expressed that an ‘Additional Rest Day’ at retail markets would be introduced. Did the Government communicate with the trade on this issue? If yes, what is the outcome?

Answer: To follow-up one of the recommendations proposed in the 2002 Avian Influenza Investigation Report, the FEHD has been communicating with the live poultry retail trade representatives since May last year on introducing an additional “Rest Day” each month. At the last regular meeting with the trade on 20 February 2003, FEHD put across the proposal of an additional “Rest Day” per month. The representatives of the live poultry retailers expressed that the proposal would have an impact on the trade. Nevertheless, they appreciated the significance of the new measure in the prevention of outbreak of avian flu. The

retail trade representatives however suggested that the cleansing and disinfection of the premises should commence at 1200 hours (noon). Such arrangement could meet operational need of the retailers on one hand and effectively reduce the risk of avian flu outbreak on the other.

Having considered the views of the trade, FEHD decided that the additional “Rest Day” be set on the 10th day of each month and take effect from March onwards. The additional “Rest Day” commences at noon time. That is to say, all live poultry retailers are required to complete slaughtering of the live poultry remaining before 1200 hours, followed by thorough cleansing and disinfection of the premises. Normal trading will be resumed the next day. FEHD will notify all live poultry retailers and explain to them the implementation details shortly.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
24 February 2003