

**For Information on  
10 May 2005**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**DISCOVERY OF AVIAN INFLUENZA VIRUS A SUBTYPE H7  
IN THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

**Purpose**

The paper informs Members of the recent report on the discovery of avian influenza virus A subtype H7 in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

**Background**

2. On 7 April 2005, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) received a report submitted by the Director of the Veterinary and Anti-Epizootic Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, DPRK on an avian influenza outbreak confirmed in DPRK.

3. The event was started in a Hadang poultry farm on 25 February 2005. In response, the National Veterinary and Anti-epizootic Emergency Committee organised the incineration and burying of all the chickens in the infected blocks. It was confirmed on 26 March 2005 that the avian influenza outbreak was caused by avian influenza virus A subtype H7. Tests are currently under way to determine the N subtype of the virus. A total of over 218 000 chickens were culled and buried during the disease outbreaks.

**Implications to Hong Kong**

4. Despite Hong Kong did not have any trade with DPRK with regards to live poultry and birds and poultry products, we suspended the importation of live poultry, poultry products and pet birds from DPRK on 29

March 2005 when the incident was first made known to the public. With our existing preventive measures and biosecurity in farms, the risk of H7 subtype viruses being introduced to Hong Kong poultry is considered to be low. That said, there has been H7 subtype causing highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak. In the Netherlands, over 80 humans were ill with one death during an outbreak caused by H7N7 virus in 2003. The discovery of H7 subtype infection in DPRK warrants special attention in the face of outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses in a region where the threat of H5 subtype has been prevailing.

5. Hong Kong has implemented a vaccination programme for all local chicken farms since June 2003. The Mainland also vaccinated all chickens for export to Hong Kong in early 2004. But the vaccination is only effective against H5 subtype avian influenza viruses. If H7 subtype viruses are introduced to Hong Kong, there may have an outbreak of avian influenza in the poultry population which could affect humans especially if it occurs in the wet markets. Although there are commercially available H7 vaccines that we could use to protect our flocks if the need arises, they may not be effective to the intruding viruses if they are novel ones created by the re-assortment of different viruses available in the region.

6. To address the increasing risk of avian influenza outbreaks, the Administration announced a comprehensive plan of action at the joint meeting of the Panel on Health Services and the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene held on 14 March 2005. The WHO has expressed its support for the plan, which features a fundamental change to the existing *modus operandi* of the live poultry trade. Dr. Henk Bekedam, Representative of WHO in the Mainland, spoke in favour of the rationale behind the Administration's proposals and cautioned that there was an urgent need for Hong Kong to review the existing operations of wet markets. He was of the view that since animals mix in wet markets, it would be possible that they could exchange viruses and as a result give birth to new viruses.

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau**  
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