

**For discussion
on 11 July 2006**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Management of Public Access to
Mai Po Nature Reserve / Wetland Park / Walk-in Aviaries**

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the criteria set for managing public access to the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Wetland Park and other walk-in aviaries after any live or dead bird samples tested positive for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) viruses are collected from these areas or their vicinity.

BACKGROUND

2. Over 100,000 migratory birds visit Hong Kong every year. The potential transmission of HPAI viruses from other regions to Hong Kong via migratory wild birds has long been of concern to the public. In the past when we found H5N1-infected wild birds in Hong Kong, we would take precautionary measure by closing the relevant government owned/managed facilities such as the Mai Po Nature Reserve and walk-in aviaries managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD).

3. We have recently reviewed the above measures and considered that there is a need to assess the risk of HPAI-infected wild birds to local public health in order to set guidelines based on which to make decisions with regard to the shut-down and re-opening of Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Wetland Park and other public walk-in aviaries when HPAI-infected wild birds are found again in Hong Kong.

Epidemiology of HPAI in wild birds in local wetlands from 2005 (September) to 2006 (May)

4. In the area of Mai Po Nature Reserve, faecal droppings or cloacal swabs of live wild birds were regularly collected and tested by Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the University of Hong Kong (HKU). Since September 2005, about 9,600 dead birds of 14 orders and 48 families had been tested for HPAI. As of mid June, there are 15 dead wild birds and 2 abandoned chickens tested positive for highly pathogenic H5N1 viruses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Based on the local epidemiological picture of HPAI in wild birds and the assumption that all HPAI viruses found can be transmitted from wild birds to humans directly or indirectly through contaminated materials, the following recommendations are made to regulate public access to government owned/managed facilities including Mai Po Nature Reserve, Wetland Park and other walk-in aviaries.

- (a) If dead wild birds are found to have H5 virus within 3 km radius of the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Mai Po Nature Reserve will be closed to public access for a period of 21 days. This so called “3 km radius” rule is used by many European countries including U.K., France and Germany as the radius for a quarantine restricted zone and “21 days” are the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) standard for setting a required surveillance period for H5 AI for live birds in a H5 AI infected compartment / zone. A map showing appropriately the areas included in the “3 km radius” of Mai Po Nature Reserve and the Wetland Park is at Annex.
- (b) A similar mechanism should be in place for the Wetland Park. The outdoor section of the Wetland Park will be closed to the public for 21 days if dead birds found within a 3 km radius are tested positive for H5 virus. However, the indoor section of the Wetland Park can still be opened

to public, subject to the implementation of specific biosecurity measures to ensure that there is no possible threat of carrying contaminated materials being brought into such areas.

- (c) The proposed criteria will also apply to the closure and re-opening of the walk-in aviaries managed by the LCSD as the droppings of wild birds outside the aviaries may still be able to contaminate the aviaries and the public inside the aviaries may have very close contact with those birds or their droppings.
- (d) During the closure period, surveillance will be increased with the sampling rate being doubled. Routine surveillance of bird population for H5 virus with, for example, 200 samples of droppings being tested per “21 days” will be increased to 400 samples per “21 days”.
- (e) If all tests are negative during the “21 days”, the Mai Po Nature Reserve, outdoor section of the Wetland Park or other walk-in aviaries will be re-opened.
- (f) If any test is positive during the “21 days”, public access to these facilities will continue to be restricted and monitoring will continue for another “21 days” from the day of sampling with positive result.

ADVICE SOUGHT

6. Members are invited to comment on the criteria set out in paragraph 4. We will liaise with the relevant stakeholders on the implementation details of the guidelines.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
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