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The honorable Mr. Cheung Yu-yan,
Chairman of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene, and
the honorable Dr. Joseph LEE Kok-long,
Chairman of the Panel on Health Services.

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for asking me to comment on the risk of avian influenza in HKSAR. The summary of the present situation is as follows:

1. The influenza A H5N1 virus is causing bird diseases in Asia and Europe with significant impact on agricultural economy.
2. Depopulation, farm/ wet market biosecurity measures and poultry immunization are known to be effective in HKSAR to stop poultry disease but not so in geographically more extensive and developing regions with lots of backyard farms.
3. The virus has increased in virulence and resistance to environmental stress and antiviral drugs by changing its genetic make up. Moreover the virus is changing from year to year. These genetic changes may one day decrease the efficacy of the poultry vaccine used at HKSAR. These genetic changes may also allow to virus to cause increasing proportion of asymptomatic infection in birds.
4. At present the virus is still causing human disease in Indonesia with high fatality as a result of bird to human transmission.
5. No antiviral or vaccine are presently available or if available, documented to be highly effective in treatment or prevention of human diseases respectively.
6. At the winter of last year, the virus is found in oriental Magpie Robin, Crested Myna, ... etc and smuggled chicken from the Mainland. It is difficult to institute measures that decreases the risk of infection of our local wild birds by the virus from migratory birds. We can only work on the smuggled birds or legally imported poultry.

7. The only documented way to prevent human infection is an effective segregation between human and birds:

- a. for migratory birds or local wild birds: personal hygiene and avoiding their habitats with high numbers of birds.
- b. for pet or recreational birds: personal hygiene and immunization of these recreational birds
- c. for smuggled poultry or pet birds: border control at ALL checkpoints including the Chung Ying Street
- d. for legally imported poultry: central slaughtering is the answer

9. HKSAR being surrounded by regions which are already endemic for H5N1 virus, is in a precarious situation. Increasingly stringent measures are necessary to maintain our bird flu-free status which has been won through much hard lessons and work.

Thanks for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Yuen Kwok-Yung
Chair of Infectious Disease
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