

**For discussion  
on 29 January 2014**

**Legislative Council  
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Update on Prevention and Control of Avian Influenza**

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper briefs Members on the preventive and control measures of avian influenza (AI) adopted by the Administration, including the immediate response measures upon confirmation of the positive H7 AI samples found in imported live poultry on 27 January 2014.

**PREVAILING MEASURES AGAINST AI**

2. The preventive and control measures that have been put in place in relation to poultry over the years, as well as the enhanced measures taken since April 2013 in response to the H7N9 AI confirmed human case in the Mainland, have been summarised in the paper submitted to the Panel on 19 November 2013 (LC Paper No. CB(2)277/13-14(03)).

**ENHANCED SURVEILLANCE AGAINST H7 AI**

3. Since the occurrence of H7N9 AI cases in the Mainland last year, Hong Kong has been on high alert and carried out measures to safeguard the spread of the virus. Since 11 April 2013, we have conducted H7 tests on imported live poultry at the boundary control point. Up to end of last week, over 14 000 samples have been tested and they were all tested negative for H5 and H7 AI viruses. On the basis of these measures, with the consensus of the Mainland authorities, we have since 24 January 2014 further implemented H7 AI serological testing to strengthen our capability in background monitoring and provide early warning for AI.

## **LATEST DEVELOPMENTS**

4. On 27 January 2014, the Government confirmed a number of positive samples tested with H7 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test in a batch of live chickens imported from a registered poultry farm in Shunde District of Foshan City of Guangdong Province. The Secretary for Food and Health had immediately chaired a meeting of the Steering Committee on Serious Response Level under the Preparedness Plan for Influenza Pandemic. The meeting decided to adopt the following contingency measures to prevent the virus from spreading in the community and safeguard public health in accordance with the Preparedness Plan for Influenza Pandemic on the Serious Response Level.

5. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has declared the Cheung San Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market as an infected place. All of the some 20 000 live poultry in the market were culled on 28 January 2014. The market would be closed for 21 days until 18 February 2014 for thorough disinfection and cleansing. Trading of live poultry (including Mainland and local live poultry) would be suspended. During the closure of the wholesale poultry market, local chicken farms would be temporarily banned from supplying live chickens to the market. AFCD officers would inspect all the local chicken farms and collect more samples for testing to ensure that local farms are not affected by H7 AI. It should be noted that this was not an outbreak, but a testing system in Hong Kong doing what it was designed to do and serving as an additional safety measure to reduce the risk of infected birds arriving in retail markets in Hong Kong.

6. In addition, in accordance with the consensus reached with the Mainland in dealing with H7 AI cases, the Government has notified the relevant Mainland authorities of the incident to facilitate their investigation of the source of infection. Supply of live poultry from the relevant registered poultry farm to Hong Kong would be suspended, while the relevant entry-exit inspection and quarantine authority would conduct investigation and ensure that the farm complies with the biosecurity management requirements. Upon expiry of the 21-day suspension period, the Mainland authorities would conduct surveillance on the relevant poultry farm and notify Hong Kong of the result. Supply from the farm would resume only after both sides are content with the investigation result.

7. Besides, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has located the poultry worker responsible for transporting the consignment of live chickens concerned (being a close contact). He has remained asymptomatic and was admitted to Princess Margaret Hospital for observation. His respiratory specimen was negative for the H7 virus upon preliminary laboratory testing by the CHP's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch (PHLSB). In collaboration with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and AFCD, CHP has located a total of 95 other contacts, comprising 11 staff members of Man Kam To Animal Inspection Station (MKTAIS), 35 poultry workers at Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market and 49 workers involved in the culling operation. They are put under medical surveillance and given health advice. CHP will follow-up on their health condition. Among them, an officer of MKTAIS developed non-specific symptoms and his respiratory specimen was negative for H7 upon preliminary testing by the PHLSB. CHP has also issued letters to doctors and hospitals to keep them abreast of the latest situation. Doctors are advised to remain vigilant and to report to the CHP immediately if there is any suspected case.

8. AFCD, FEHD and the Centre for Food Safety will also step up their prevention and control measures against H7 AI virus at various levels of the supply chain of live poultry.

## **FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS**

9. The Government appreciates that the above culling actions and the temporary suspension of the wholesale poultry market would bring inconvenience to the public and have impact on the livelihood of the workers in the live poultry trade, especially at this time when the Lunar New Year is round the corner. However, taking into account the fact that H7N9 AI is pathogenic to human beings and can lead to more serious consequences, for the sake of public health protection, we are duty bound to take swift measures to prevent the spread of the virus in the community. In response to the requests of the poultry trade, the Government would assess the impact of the incident on the live poultry trade and their workers. We would also explore the feasibility of the separate holding of imported and local live poultry before the AI testing results are available. We would listen to the views of the trade and consider further.

10. Over the past years, the Government and the local live poultry industry, as well as the Mainland inspection and quarantine authorities and the farms supplying Hong Kong, have collaboratively built up a resilient and stringent system for the surveillance and control of AI, for the purpose of reducing the AI risks in Hong Kong. To mitigate the AI risks, the local live poultry trade has put in a lot of efforts and resources to ensure that the farms comply with all the biosecurity measures, whilst the Government has also invested a lot of public resources in the inspection and testing of imported and local live poultry, as well as the surveillance and biosecurity measures adopted in the supply chain of live poultry. The Mainland inspection and quarantine authorities and the farms supplying Hong Kong have also made significant efforts to ensure the safety of live poultry supplying Hong Kong. But there is no system that can attain zero risk. Occasionally we would still encounter AI cases, which may pose threat to public health, exert impacts on the community including the poultry trade and bring anxiety and worries to the citizens, at a considerable cost to society on the whole. Indeed, the main risk source of AI infection by humans is from the contact with infected live poultry. On public health grounds, we should consider whether Hong Kong, being a place with scarce land resources and a densely populated city, should continue with the practice enabling close contact between human and poultry. In many developed cities like Hong Kong, there is generally no longer any selling of live poultry. And in Hong Kong, we have observed a change in the culinary pattern of the ordinary citizens and there is increasing consumption of chilled and frozen poultry on the whole. We believe it is time for the Government, the poultry trade and the citizens to rethink whether there should still be selling of live poultry in Hong Kong in the long run. The Government would consider engagement of a consultant to study and make recommendation in this regard.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

11. Members are invited to note the content of the paper.

**Food and Health Bureau**  
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