



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Success story

Viet Nam Government and International Partners Join Forces to Strengthen Prevention and Response against Avian influenza A (H7N9)



On 31 March 2013, the authorities of the People's Republic of China reported the first human cases of infection with the novel avian influenza A (H7N9) to the World Health Organization. This virus which has a human case fatality rate of about 30% (30/100 infected people die), causes no clinical symptoms in poultry and is therefore difficult to detect in poultry at farms or markets. The threat of incursion of the avian influenza A (H7N9) virus became more significant to Viet Nam in late January 2014 when the virus was detected along the northern border in Guangxi Province, China. This threat

is associated with the long porous border with China and the daily cross-border movements of people, eggs, and poultry including spent hens and day-old chicks. While poultry do not get sick from this virus, H7N9 presents a serious public health risk when there is close contact between infected poultry and humans which has primarily taken place at live bird markets in China. It was also important to consider that if the virus entered Viet Nam, there was a high chance that temporary market closures and price drops in poultry could result in significant impacts to livelihoods of farmers and traders as this disease caused losses of more than \$26 billion USD in China due to impacts on poultry consumption, trade, and production.

Through the sub-group on Communicable Diseases within the Health Joint Planning Group and in response to the threat of H7N9 incursion, FAO and WHO supported the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) improve contingency planning and preparedness, implement prevention measures, increase the sensitivity of human and animal surveillance, and prepare for a possible joint One Health response.

Several milestones accomplished through the One Health collaboration between MARD, MOH, FAO, and WHO include: 1) co-chairing a “Briefing on the International Influenza A (H7N9) Disease Situation and Vietnam's Prevention, Control and Preparedness Activities and Resource Mobilization Workshop”; 2) developing and releasing MOH and MARD H7N9 contingency plans; 3) the release of the Prime Minister’s telegram No 200 (February 2014) on strengthen prevention of A/H7N9 and other zoonotic AI Prevention; and 4) the Deputy Prime Minister Chaired meeting on Strengthening Prevention and Control of Avian Influenza & Launching the Campaign on Measles Vacxin meeting with MOH, MOIT, MARD and 63 Provinces.

With regard to surveillance, the hospital patient surveillance program set up by WHO through the SARI system combined with the targeted chicken and environmental sampling conducted at live bird markets in 9 northern border Provinces, the MOH and MARD have been able to ensure the people of Viet Nam and the international community that H7N9 virus has not been introduced into the country as of 9 January 2015. Considerable advocacy has also led to the Minister of MARD strongly supporting actions to prevent the movement of poultry and poultry products into Viet Nam from neighbouring countries, and effort that has also significantly reduced the risk of the H7N9 virus being introduced through unofficial trade.

During the peak periods of concern, WHO, FAO, MOH and MARD conducted weekly risk assessments in Viet Nam for Avian Influenza A (H7N9) to determine the risk level to Viet Nam for the emergence of a human infection with avian influenza A (H7N9) virus, and the risk level of H7N9 infected poultry entering into Viet Nam. This collaborative process evaluated the epidemiology and laboratory information available from the on-going epidemic and also evaluated risks related to poultry movements, value chains, and trade.

In an effort to raise awareness for multiple stakeholders including local communicates, persons at higher risk due to occupational risk associated with working at live bird markets, and to increase overall awareness to national and provincial leaders, FAO, WHO, MARD and MOH contributed to joint H7N9 communication tool kit, fact sheets, public statements, and a joint press release. In addition, the One Health partners provided briefings to international partners, stakeholders, and journalists, in collaboration with other partners.

In order to test the efficiency of the response to an influenza A H7N9 incursion, the partners also conducted joint assessment missions to high risk Provinces and jointly met and discussed response activities with local staff from the animal and public health sector. Additionally, WHO and FAO have implemented a table-top exercise that has improved communication and coordination among responsible government counterparts at both the central and Provincial government levels.

Viet Nam has learned from past experience that the animal and human health sectors need to collaborate and take early action to prevent the spread of any new disease that threatens the health of people and the animal trade. FAO and WHO have supported the government of Viet Nam to be better prepared to safeguard human health and prevent impacts to the poultry industry & local livelihoods should this virus should enter the country. This has been a great collaboration within the context of the Communicable Disease sub-group of the Health JPG.