



No significant change in Indonesian bird flu virus

Jakarta, 6 October 2006 – The latest results of sequencing tests on virus isolates from poultry infected with avian influenza in Indonesia indicate that the virus is not mutating towards a more virulent strain that could attack humans and set off a pandemic.

Studies of the sequences of more than 49 virus isolates from poultry on the islands of Sumatra, Java and Bali show no significant changes or mutation in the characteristics of the H5N1 avian influenza virus which is affecting much of the country.

The results were recently received from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reference laboratory in Australia by the Indonesian government.

Indonesia has been facing a major epidemic of avian influenza in poultry since late 2003, and the disease has become endemic in many areas of the country. FAO is working closely with the country's agriculture ministry to support a national control programme based on public awareness, early disease reporting and investigation with prompt diagnosis and response.

Indonesia is committed to working closely with the international community to monitor the evolution of the H5N1 avian influenza virus. As part of this commitment, Indonesia recently dispatched 91 virus isolates to the OIE/FAO reference laboratory in Australia. The isolates were provided by the national network of seven main veterinary diagnostic laboratories.

A number of virus isolates collected from April to September 2006 will be shipped at the end of this month for further characterization, a process which enables close tracking of any mutation in a virus. Such mutations could provide early warning of a possible human pandemic and allow for the development of human vaccines.

OFFLU, a joint FAO and OIE network of reference, and animal and human health laboratories, issued a statement in August, calling on scientists, international organizations and countries to share virus strains and sequences in an effort to speed up control of the spread of H5N1 avian influenza. Indonesia has demonstrated its support for this initiative and will continue to share viruses with international scientists on a regular basis.