



JOINT STATEMENT

Influenza A (H7N9)



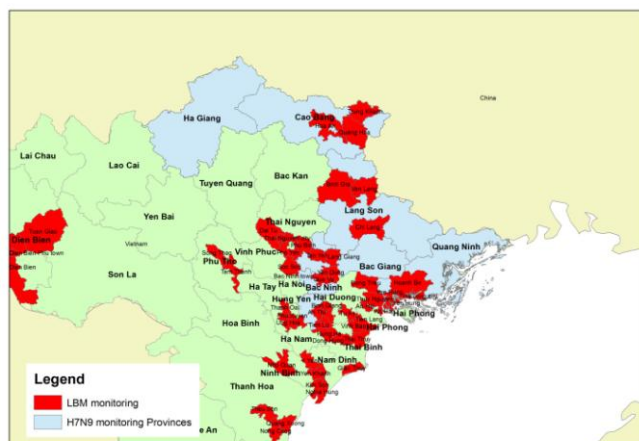
Hanoi, 3 June 2013

As of 28 May 2013, there have been a total of 132 confirmed cases of avian influenza A (H7N9) infection in humans, including 37 deaths. Although some H7 viruses (H7N2, H7N3 and H7N7) have occasionally been found to infect humans, no human infections with H7N9 viruses have been reported until recent reports from China. At this time, there is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission but only about 40% of the human cases are linked to poultry exposure making the source of infection difficult to pinpoint.

This novel H7N9 virus contains genetic segments from 3 avian sources: 1) *domestic ducks* in China (the H7 portion); 2) *wild birds* (the N9 portion); and 3) other internal genes most likely from *domestic poultry* in the region. While this unique virus can be lethal in people, as of 28 May this virus appears to be of low pathogenicity in poultry - in other words, it causes mild or no illness in poultry making it very difficult to clinically monitor, track and control. In China this virus has been detected in domestic chickens, domestic ducks, domestic pigeons and domestic quail, as well as people.

As a precaution, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) strongly supports the decision to the Department of Animal Health (DAH) and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) to heightened control at the borders to prevent poultry and viruses from entering the country, and jointly, DAH, MARD and FAO have analysed more than 500 samples previously collected as part of the DAH-FAO poultry surveillance programs and thus far, all samples have tested negative for H7N9 virus. FAO ECTAD Viet Nam, through support of USAID, is also providing further financial support to conducted heightened surveillance along the border of China which will include sampling poultry at collecting points and markets in order to increase the likelihood of detecting H7N9 virus, should it enter Viet Nam through poultry movements.

It is important to note that information from China demonstrates that intensive poultry sampling in China



(over 200,000 birds) has provided only a small proportion (0.025%, n = 51) of positive H7N9 birds suggesting that this virus is not yet widespread in poultry, and the chances of detecting it from the heightened DAH-FAO surveillance program is not high, but still worthwhile due to the significant public health threat that this novel virus poses. However, based on the information to date about this virus, detection of its presence based on clinically ill people is probably more likely as compared to detecting it in either healthy or sick poultry.

DAH and FAO would like to remind people that influenza viruses are not transmitted through consumption of well-cooked food. Influenza viruses are inactivated by normal temperatures used for cooking so if food reaches 70°C in all parts, it is safe to eat as long as it was properly prepared and cooked. However, DAH and FAO recommend not eating or coming into contact with sick or diseased animals, or animals of unknown origin.

“We fully understand that multi-sectoral collaboration and central coordination are very important to carry out effective H7N9 response activities. Political commitment, timely surveillance and improving laboratory capacity for H7N9 detection are the most essential steps. Transparent communication and sharing information with international community will help Vietnam be ready for to implement H7N9 control”, said Director General, Dr Pham Van Dong.

Viet Nam, as a country that imports livestock, upholds international standards to ensure veterinary systems for live animal screening, certification and the control of goods. These measures promote the import of healthy and wholesome products and/or animals. In the case of H7N9 in China, the reservoir or carrier of the virus has yet to be confirmed. Knowing which species serve this function is essential when dealing with animal diseases in order to target response actions accordingly, including potential trade restrictions.

"Since the virus is not widespread in poultry, good hygiene and biosecurity practices along the entire food chain, from farm to chopsticks, become even more important to reduce the risk of virus transmission to humans and animals" said Dr. Scott Newman, Senior Technical Coordinator of the FAO ECTAD Viet Nam.

DAH and FAO recommend keeping all birds and livestock separate from people and living areas and emphasize that proper biosecurity and hygiene measures should be practiced by farmers, livestock producers, transporters, market workers, and consumers in order to protect the people, animals, livelihoods and food security.

Vaccination of animals is *not* recommended because more information is needed to determine the efficacy of commercially available H7 vaccines against the virus strain circulating in China. Further information about the circulation and pathogenicity of the virus in poultry populations is also required in order to make an informed decision.

FAO is monitoring the situation closely through its wide network of country and regional offices and key partners, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). FAO remains committed to assisting the government of Vietnam in these efforts, supporting both MARD, MOH, other Ministries, WHO and other partners required to address this emerging pandemic threat.

DAH and FAO would like to remind everyone to pay close attention to the events of H7N9 and to do everything necessary, to be well prepared. However, we must remember that H5N1 HPAI recently took the life of a 4 year old Vietnamese boy in Dong Thap Province; it recently caused 8 human deaths in neighbouring Cambodia; and has caused a mortality event in Swiftlets in Ninh Thuan Province reminding us that sustained effort is needed to curtail impacts of this influenza virus as well as the newly emerging H7N9.

In Viet Nam, there have been no cases of avian influenza A (H7N9) detected in either animals or people thus far but government authorities (MARD and Ministry of Health) are on high alert and working closely with international organisations (FAO and WHO) to be prepared should the virus come to Viet Nam.

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Additional information about Influenza-A H7N9 can be found at:

FAO VN: <http://www.fao.org.vn/>
Frequently Asked Questions: <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/173704/icode/>