

For Information

Legislative Council Panel on Food and Environmental Hygiene

Report on the Recent Avian Influenza Incident

Purpose

This paper provides Members with an updated report on the recent chicken influenza incident and the improvement control measures that the Administration has taken.

The Incident

(a) *Local farms*

2. On 8 February 2002, we last reported situation of the recent avian influenza incident to this Panel via paper under reference of CB (2)1105/01-02(01).

3. On 9 February, we started putting into place a number of measures to tighten the inspection and testing of chickens from local farms (please see paragraph 10 for details). By 18 February, another 11 quarantined farms within the Kam Tin Area were found to have been infected, leaving only eight farms in the Kam Tin Area unaffected at that time. All known infected farms were depopulated and after considering the advice of the Expert Working Group on Avian Influenza that the remaining farms were likely to be infected, the Administration decided on 19 February to depopulate these farms also. Subsequent test results have confirmed that all but four farms in the quarantine area in Kam Tin were infected. As regards the two quarantined farms in Lau Fau Shan and Pak Sha, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) concluded, after thorough investigation, that the chickens there were not infected with H5 virus and they were allowed to send birds to market under strict controls on and after 19 February.

4. On 20 February, a farm owner at Pak Sha reported to AFCD that there were chicken deaths on his farm. AFCD immediately went to the farm to investigate and found 140 dead chickens. Samples were taken from the farm for testing and the farm was closed at once. After further investigation, AFCD's testing demonstrated that the farm was infected with an H5 virus and it was depopulated on 23 February. Initial investigations did not reveal any direct link between this infected farm in Pak Sha with the farms in Kam Tin or the earlier quarantined farm in Pak Sha.

5. On 3 March 2002, AFCD detected 100 dead chickens on another farm in Pak Sha. Tests showed that the farm was infected with an H5 virus. Action was taken on 5 March 2002 to depopulate the farm.

6. As of now, a total of 25 local farms (including 22 in Kam Tin, one in Hung Shui Kiu and two in Pak Sha) have been depopulated. Some 900,000 chickens in these farms were destroyed.

(b) *Markets*

7. Since the extra rest day for cleansing all retail markets on 8 February, the state of chicken health in retail markets has been generally normal.

8. As regards the Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market, we found about 200 dead chickens on 21 February. Testing revealed that the dead chickens were infected with avian influenza. The concerned area of the wholesale market was thoroughly cleansed and disinfected. Another round of thorough cleansing and disinfection in the wholesale market took place on 24 and 25 February.

(c) *Testing results*

9. We are now conducting gene sequencing analysis of the H5 viruses isolated in the incident. The test results of samples taken from the first two depopulated farms show that the virus is an H5N1 virus but is not the same as the H5N1 virus that affected human health in 1997. Experts also hold the view that there is no evidence to date to show that the virus affecting the chicken population this time would affect humans. The full testing results would be available soon.

Improvement measures

10. We identified a number of measures for immediate implementation as regards chickens from local farms starting 9 February -

- (a) In addition to conducting blood testing for H5 antibody no more than five days before local chickens are released to the market, an additional blood test is conducted before the chickens are sold to retail outlets. This second blood test is done at Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market, through which all chickens from local farms must now be sold. Only chickens that pass the test are allowed to be sold to retailers;
- (b) When chickens from local farms are delivered to the wholesale market, AFCD staff verify the farm of origin, the number of birds, and the documents certifying that the chickens have undergone the first blood test. They then check for dead birds in the consignment and collect blood samples before the chickens are allowed to be unloaded;
- (c) Chickens from local farms are directed to a designated area in the Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market and are not allowed to be mixed with imported chickens until the second blood test results are available;
- (d) Each vehicle is only used for transporting consignments of chickens from one single local farm to the Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market to reduce the probability of cross-contamination; and
- (e) All vehicles used for transporting chickens from local farms must be cleansed thoroughly in the Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market before they are allowed to collect clean cages for transportation of chickens from local farms to the wholesale market.

In addition, AFCD deployed staff to oversee on site the loading and transportation of local chickens during the peak season for sale of live chickens prior to the Lunar New Year.

11. Furthermore, we have identified areas where local farm biosecurity can be improved. AFCD is maintaining an active dialogue with the local chicken farmers with a view to upgrading farm bio-security and enhancing hygiene standards of local farms.

Further Investigation and Actions

12. The Secretary for the Environment and Food has set up an investigation team to establish cause(s) leading to the current influenza outbreak in local farms and to recommend measures to reduce the likelihood of such incidents recurring in future. The team is headed by DAFC and comprises an influenza expert, a veterinary surgeon, a member of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries, the Deputy Director of AFCD and Deputy Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. A report is expected to be submitted to the Secretary in six week's time. We will report the findings of the investigation team to this Panel.

**Environment and Food Bureau
March 2002**

