

29 December 2011

Influenza A (H5N1) Outbreak in Hong Kong



- Influenza is a viral infection.
- There are a total of three main types of influenza virus: Influenza A, B and C. Avian flu belongs to Type A influenza virus. Type A and B are common causes for seasonal human influenza epidemics. The current avian flu in Hong Kong is the H5N1 subtype of Influenza A.
- Current data for H5N1 infection indicates an incubation period for H5N1 avian influenza in humans ranging from two to eight days and possibly as long as 17 days. Hence, this period of time would be critical in monitoring the development of new human cases.
- The H5N1 virus, which does not pass easily from human to human, has killed more than 330 people worldwide, with Indonesia being the worst-hit country. Most human infections are the result of direct contact with infected birds. In people, it can cause fever, coughing, sore throat, pneumonia, respiratory disease and, in about 60 per cent of cases, death. However, as of 24 December 2011, there has been no report of human cases of avian influenza infection in Hong Kong following the culling of poultry.
- The Hong Kong government has reacted promptly and taken various measures to prevent the spread of the H5N1 virus in poultry as well as enhanced the surveillance on human Influenza A (H5N1) infection.
- In Singapore, the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) maintains a multi-layered risk mitigation approach towards the incursion of avian influenza into Singapore. This includes import conditions for live birds coming into Singapore and maintaining tight biosecurity on the local poultry farms. Such necessary precautionary measures help to prevent the introduction of avian influenza into Singapore.
- The risk of spread of H5N1 virus to Singapore is currently assessed to remain very low in view of AVA's measures, and that no human cases have been reported in Hong Kong to date.
- MOH has advised travellers to Hong Kong to remain vigilant against avian influenza infection and observe measures recommended by the local health authorities in Hong Kong, including the following:
 - Avoid direct contact with poultry, birds or their droppings, and if contact is made, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water;
 - Cook poultry and eggs thoroughly before eating;
 - Wash hands frequently;
 - Avoid crowded places and contact with sick people who have fever;
 - Wear a mask when you have respiratory symptoms or are feeling unwell.





- Travellers returning to Singapore from Hong Kong should seek prompt medical attention and provide their travel history to their doctors, if they develop fever and/or influenza-like illnesses. Symptoms of influenza infection are:
 - Abrupt onset of high fever usually greater than 38 degree Celsius with chills;
 - Accompanied with dry coughing and other respiratory tract infection symptoms such as running nose, sore throat and sneezing;
 - Associated with body aching, headache, malaise and breathlessness.
- Regular influenza vaccination is recommended to protect against seasonal influenza. It does not protect against the current H5N1 flu virus, but if one exhibits flu symptoms despite being given the influenza vaccination previously, it will alert the doctor that the patient may be infected with a different influenza virus such as the avian flu virus.
- Singaporeans are advised to refer to the Hong Kong Centre for Health Protection website at <http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/> to obtain the latest updates on the latest avian influenza situation in Hong Kong.