

AVIAN INFLUENZA - THE CHRONOLOGY OF A DISEASE

Going back in time to the first outbreak of the current wave of avian influenza outbreaks in December 2003, FAO traces some of the most significant milestones in a disease that threatens lives and livelihoods across three continents.

2006

December

Three-day international donor conference (Dec. 6-8) ends in Bamako, with major donors pledging USD 475.9 million to support on the global fight against avian influenza. These funds are in addition to the almost USD 1.9 billion pledged at the first donor conference in Beijing. The major donor is the United States (USD 100 million) followed by Canada (USD 92.5 million), the European Commission (USD 88.2 million) and Japan (USD 67 million).

The Republic of Korea reports third case of highly pathogenic H5N1 in less than one month - 3,000 out of 290,000 quail die on farm, just as culling operations are completed following two earlier outbreaks.

International panel of experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) say the so-called 'Fujian-like virus' cannot be the result of China's vaccination programme because it is not a new strain having been first identified in 2005.

China promises new head of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Chinese avian influenza expert Margaret Chan, that it will share avian influenza samples more quickly, after concern that Chinese secrecy was hampering understanding of the virus.

November

The Republic of Korea reports two separate cases of highly pathogenic H5N1 in domestic poultry in less than one week. The authorities carry out mass culling and kill cats and dogs on the affected farms, threatening to kill more as a preventive measure.

China begins looking to phase out live poultry markets as part of plans to fight avian influenza more effectively.

The World Bank estimates that as much as US\$ 1.3 billion more (on top of the US\$ 1.9 billion pledged in Beijing in January) is needed to fight avian influenza, with more than US\$ 500 million of that going to Africa.

Avian influenza virus is discovered in two turkeys in Cote d'Ivoire, marking the first avian influenza outbreak in the country in six months.

Thousands of domestic poultry destroyed in and around the southern Sudanese capital of Juba in an attempt to contain an avian influenza threat reported in the region in September.

A U.S.-led team of scientists at the University of New Hampshire launches project that uses satellite data to predict avian influenza's spread and create an accurate early warning system.

Egypt reports three new cases of H5N1 avian influenza in domestic birds.

WHO urges Chinese and foreign scientists to stop squabbling and share information to figure out how to combat a new H5N1 avian influenza virus strain that is spreading unchecked in poultry flocks.

The U.S. government approves the use of fire-fighting foam to quickly kill chickens if there is an outbreak of deadly avian influenza in commercial poultry.

October

FAO and WHO say new variant of H5N1 avian influenza viruses reported in China (the so-called 'Fujian-like strain') does not appear to raise or lower the risk the virus poses to humans.

FAO says a resurgence of H5N1 in China and Russia indicates the pattern may be repeated in Europe, with wild ducks, swans and geese carrying the lethal virus south from their Arctic mating grounds.

Indonesia says it will bar city residents from keeping chickens and other poultry in their backyards.

A meeting of OIE, FAO, World Bank and European Commission experts concludes that the setting up of an international fund to compensate farmers in poor countries for avian influenza culling could encourage them to report outbreaks of the disease.

September

China sends long-sought samples of the H5N1 avian influenza virus for further analysis in a U.S. laboratory, the first in 2½ years, and announces that 4.88 billion domestic fowl had been vaccinated by the end of June in a bid to prevent and control the spread of avian influenza disease.

Egypt confirms new cases of avian influenza in domestic, mostly backyard, birds.

The World Bank says a severe avian influenza pandemic among humans could cost the global economy over USD 1 trillion and perhaps as much as USD 2 trillion in a worst-case scenario, representing more than three percent of the global economy's gross national product.

Chinese and U.S. officials agree on shipping procedures for avian influenza samples, following disagreement over classification of samples as 'diagnosed' (which requires weeks for shipping approval, and which Chinese officials wanted) rather than 'undiagnosed' (which allows quicker delivery).

A team of international scientists, including an expert from FAO, attaches GPS transmitters to wild whooper swans in Mongolia in an effort to track the birds to their wintering grounds in Eurasia and shed light on how wild birds may be involved in the spread of avian influenza.

Cambodia reports new avian influenza outbreak in ducks in the east of the country.

August

FAO warns that the southern Balkan area and Caucasus are considered at high risk for H5N1 because they are prime resting grounds for migratory bird species and poultry production is mostly characterized by rural and household husbandry with little in terms of biosecurity and strong regulatory inspection.

FAO and OIE announce they will share information on avian flu virus sequences and make this available to the entire scientific community through their joint avian flu network, OFFLU.

70 scientists and health officials announce the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data (GISAID), through which participants will share bird flu virus sequence data, jointly analyse and publish findings, and place their data in three public databases - the EMBL Nucleotide Sequence Database, the DNA Database of Japan and the GenBank.

The Indonesian government announces it will start sharing genetic data on H5N1 bird flu viruses by depositing them in GenBank, the public genetic sequences.

June	Representatives of more than 110 countries and international organisations meet in Vienna to take stock of global action since the Beijing pledging conference in January when Africa had still not been affected by avian flu - next meeting to be held in Mali in December, and another in about one year in India.
May	FAO and OIE host an international scientific conference on avian influenza and wild birds.
April	Bird flu now confirmed in 45 countries on three continents.
February	Bird flu reaches Nigeria. In Europe, bird flu spreads quickly westward through wild birds (Italy, Greece, Switzerland)
January	International Pledging Conference on Avian and Human Pandemic Influenza in Beijing, China commits US\$ 1.9 billion to fighting the disease. The World Bank estimates that a human influenza pandemic caused by a virus mutated from avian flu could cost the global economy US\$ 800 billion per year.

2005

December	FAO estimates that the livelihoods of 200 million poor small-scale farmers have been seriously affected by the disease.
October	Bird flu reaches Romania and Turkey through wild bird migration.
September	UN system coordinator for avian and human influenza takes up residence at UN Headquarters.
August	In Mongolia, about 90 migratory birds die of bird flu. FAO warns that Asian bird flu is likely to be carried over long distances along the flyways of wild water birds to the Middle East, Europe, South Asia and Africa.

July	Russia and Kazakhstan confirm H5N1 outbreaks in poultry and wild birds.
April-June	In China, 6 000 migratory birds die from H5N1 virus.
February	<p>IFAO, OIE and WHO organize regional meeting in Ho Chi Minh City. FAO warns that bird flu could lead to new global human influenza pandemic.</p> <p>Close to 140 million birds have died or been destroyed in Asian epidemic to date, leaving many farmers in deep debt. Cost to Asian farmers in 2004 estimated at US\$ 10 billion.</p> <p>FAO sends expert to DPR Korea, helping to contain bird flu outbreak there.</p>

2004

November	FAO and OIE warn that domestic ducks may be acting as a silent reservoir for disease transmission.
March	In Asia, 23 people have died so far and 100 million poultry have died or been culled.
February	<p>FAO provides US\$ 5.5 million from its own resources to Asian countries to fight bird flu.</p> <p>FAO, OIE and WHO hold emergency strategy meeting in Rome with experts from 14 countries.</p> <p>Officials, international experts, donors and development organizations from 23 Asia-Pacific countries meet in Bangkok for a regional emergency meeting.</p>
January	Outbreaks in 10 countries across East and Southeast Asia, closing down regional markets for poultry and poultry products overnight. FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf appeals to donors for help, warning that only "a brief window of opportunity" exists to contain the disease.

2003

December

H5N1 bird flu recognised in Republic of Korea.