



Luxembourg, 12/01/2006

Extraordinary joint meeting of the Health Security Committee, the influenza coordinators of the EU Member States and the representatives of the Member States on the Early Warning and Response System

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- Conclusions -

1) The continuing outbreaks of avian influenza in poultry and humans in Turkey are causing concern and anxiety in Europe and elsewhere. The outbreaks caused by the highly pathogenic H5N1 Asian strain of avian influenza in poultry and the associated human cases in Turkey appear to be similar to those that have occurred in other countries. The participants acknowledge the efforts of the Turkish Government, with assistance led by WHO in collaboration with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) with the active support and participation of the European Commission, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and EU Member States and other countries, to contain the outbreak and prevent transmission of the virus to humans.

2) Human cases of H5N1 that have been detected in Turkey and confirmed by the WHO Collaborating Centre have currently all been linked to exposure to infected birds and no case of human to human transmission has been documented. In this context, it is noted that cases of H5N1 that have been detected among people in Turkey are being investigated and detailed serological analysis and virus sequencing has been undertaken. The overall assessment to date does not indicate any change in the risk to humans from avian influenza and the WHO maintains its pandemic phase at level 3 (the first level of pandemic alert) as it was before the events in Turkey. This indicates that the disease is primarily an avian disease, only rarely infecting people.

3) A wide set of actions has been put in place already by the EU to prevent avian influenza spreading to poultry and other birds in the EU and for mitigation of the consequences of possible outbreaks in poultry. These include bans on the import of poultry and poultry products from affected countries and certain of their neighbours, a ban on the imports into the EU of animal products for personal consumption which includes an information campaign at entry points in the EU from third countries, and intensive surveillance of poultry and wild birds in the EU. Further more, the Commission has sent veterinary experts to affected countries to support the competent authorities in containing the disease, and since 2002 is actively supporting the upgrade of the Turkish veterinary administration with pre-accession funds including action in the avian influenza

field. Rapid containment and eradication of virus from poultry and other captive bird populations will continue to be of paramount importance in protecting both animal and human health. The new Council Directive on Community measures for the control of Avian Influenza will be a key additional tool for this purpose.

4) The Turkish authorities are commended for their transparent risk communication policy and collaboration with the European Commission and third countries and the international organisations competent in this area. Although no outbreaks in poultry or humans have been notified by countries neighbouring Turkey, it would be appropriate to step up surveillance and control activities and enhance information exchange on avian influenza between these countries. It is important to stress that awareness campaigns for all people keeping poultry and in particular for those keeping backyard poultry should be reinforced, and that any suspicion of disease be immediately notified to the competent authorities and to the OIE so as to ensure that appropriate precautions are taken to avoid contact with potentially infected birds.

5) Any change in the epidemiological situation or increase in risk is expected to be recognised rapidly. If that were the case, the measures foreseen by national and EU influenza preparedness and response plans will come into effect. These involve appropriate actions at various phases, including medical and non-medical counter-measures and close coordination between the authorities of the Member States, the European Commission, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the WHO. Plans and coordination have been the object of an exercise late last year and have led to better understanding of the evolution and dynamics of a major influenza emergency. The Turkish authorities are encouraged to continue to update their national pandemic influenza preparedness plan on the basis of the experience gained, in line with international best knowledge and practice.

6) Whilst it is difficult to predict how the situation in Turkey and elsewhere where avian influenza has been detected will evolve during the next months, the heightened awareness shown over recent months and the increasing mobilisation of human and financial resources are encouraging signs. In this context, the forthcoming pledging conference in Beijing is expected to contribute to the efforts by affected and at-risk countries to develop capacity and capability to counter outbreaks and to strengthen veterinary surveillance.

7) The EU Member States, assisted by the European Commission and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, will continue to work on improving the sharing of relevant information on the epidemiological situation and on measures taken or intended to be taken to increase transparency and effectiveness. Through the Health Security Committee jointly with EWRS and the flu coordinators the Member States shall continue to coordinate information and risk management measures. This will include the cooperation on the stockpiling of antivirals, capacity to produce better influenza vaccines in shorter time, improving national plans and production of better risk management tools. The Council and its groups including the Member States group 'Friends of the Presidency' will be kept informed and will contribute at their level to the process of coordination.