

## **ACFEH Information Paper 13**

### **Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**

#### **Views of Centre for Health Protection's Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases Suspension Period of Live Chicken Supply from the Mainland**

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#### **Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the views of the Centre for Health Protection's Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases on different approaches to determine the suspension period of live chicken supply from Guangdong following the detection of a human case of avian influenza H5 in Guangdong.

#### **Background**

2. In 2006 so far, there have been two human cases of avian influenza H5 occurring in Guangdong province. One occurred in Guangzhou (March) and the other in Shenzhen (June). Both cases visited live poultry markets during the incubation period, but a clear history of direct contact of live poultry could not be documented. No outbreak of H5 avian influenza among poultry was noted in the Guangdong during this period.

3. In both cases, the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food declared that as a precautionary measure, import of live chickens from Guangdong was to be

suspended for 21 days following confirmation of the human case, pending results of investigations on the source of infection. As subsequently there was no report of H5 avian influenza outbreaks among chicken farms in Guangdong including those farms supplying chickens to Hong Kong , live chicken import from Guangdong resumed after 21 days.

#### **Approaches to determine the suspension period**

4. The decision on timing to lift the suspension should take into account investigation findings of the individual human case in question. One needs to be satisfied of two pre-requisite conditions:

- (i) There is no evidence that the human case has been exposed to live poultry coming from a farm that supplies live poultry to Hong Kong; and,
- (ii) There is no evidence of avian influenza in Guangdong poultry farms.

5. The current 21-day suspension period draws reference from the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code in which 21 days referred to the maximum incubation period of avian influenza among chickens. The approach assumes an outbreak of H5 avian influenza has occurred among poultry in Guangdong, and an observation of period of 21 days is required to see if there is a continuing outbreak among the poultry population.

6. In the situation that we faced, a human case was detected without the discovery of H5 outbreak in poultry. In other words, we are assessing the risk pertaining to the import of live chicken indirectly through our observation of epidemiology of human disease.

7. From the epidemiological angle of avian influenza H5 in humans, one can conjure alternative approaches in determining the suspension period. This calls for several assumptions:

- The predominant mode of transmission of H5 infection among humans is bird-to-human.
- Efficient human-to-human transmission has not been established.
- Human-to-bird transmission is negligible.
- An incubation period of 7 days for human H5 infection is used for public health practice (as per current WHO recommendation).

8. Consider the scenario where the probable source of exposure of the human case is evident (e.g., contact history with live poultry / visited live poultry markets) and there is no documented outbreak of avian influenza in chicken farms or wet markets. If a poultry outbreak was ongoing, adequate surveillance systems would detect it within the 21-day incubation period of avian influenza among poultry. Based on this assumption, the suspension period may last for 21 days counting from the day of the patient's last exposure. From the experience of human cases in China, the time period from exposure to confirmation is usually more than 7 days. Thus, an empirical 14-day suspension period following the confirmation of the human case is deemed not unreasonable according to this approach.

9. Next, consider the scenario where the human case has no discernable exposure history, and there is no documented outbreak of avian influenza in chicken farms or wet markets. Here, a conservative approach to determine the empirical suspension period is to count 14 days since the confirmation of the human case. This takes reference from conventional practice to “double the

incubation period for public health practice (which corresponds to the customary upper limit of incubation period for humans)”, i.e., 2 times 7 days equals to 14 days. For example, during the SARS outbreak in 2003, the World Health Organization removed Hong Kong from the list of affected places 20 days (2 times 10 days) following the confirmation of the last human case.

10. Whilst it makes sense to stipulate an initial 14-day suspension period following the confirmation of a human case of avian influenza H5 in Guangdong, it must be emphasized again that each case has to be examined on an individual basis for epidemiological and exposure history, as well as evidence of avian influenza infection in chicken farms (re: para 4). The actual suspension period is best determined in the empirical sense and the actual date of live chicken resumption being dependent on investigation results pertaining to the particular case. If there is suspicion that avian influenza is occurring in poultry farms supplying Hong Kong, the suspension period has to be reviewed/extended depending on the actual circumstances.

### **Advice sought**

11. The Administration has adopted the majority view of the Scientific Committee and revised the poultry importation suspension period from 21 days to 14 days should human avian influenza cases were detected in Guangdong without evidence of an avian influenza outbreak in farms. A relevant press release issued on 29 July 2006 is attached at Annex for Member’s reference.

12. Members are invited to note the content of the paper.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

July 2006

## Annex

### Arrangement on suspension of Mainland poultry imports in human bird flu cases revised

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In view of expert advice, the Government would immediately revise the general suspension period of live poultry supply from the Mainland to 14 days after a human avian influenza case was confirmed, a spokesman for the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau said today (July 29).

The Scientific Committee on Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases under the Centre for Health Protection discussed the issue at a meeting yesterday afternoon. Members agreed that if human avian influenza cases were detected in Guangdong again in the future and no avian flu outbreak was recorded among poultry population, the general suspension period of live poultry supply from the Mainland could be revised to 14 days after the confirmation of a human case.

The Government previously imposed a 21-day suspension period after a human avian influenza case was found in Guangdong. This practice drew reference from the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) Terrestrial Animal Health Code in which 21 days referred to the incubation period if avian influenza were found among poultry.

Speaking on the revised arrangement, the spokesman said: "The Scientific Committee has considered several factors, including epidemiology, incubation period and mode of transmission among human and poultry, empirical data from investigation of Guangdong human cases and the Code by OIE.

"The Government also agreed with the Scientific Committee that although a general 14-day suspension following the confirmation of a human case could be set for observation purpose, it would also be necessary for the Government to examine each case on an individual basis for epidemiological and exposure history, as well as evidence of abnormal situation in poultry farms when deciding whether to extend the suspension period.

"If avian influenza were detected in poultry farms supplying Hong Kong, the 14-day suspension period would not be applied because the Government would need a much longer period of time to ensure the situation is under control prior to the resumption of import of live poultry from the Mainland."

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