What is Avian Influenza (HPAI)?

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) - more commonly known as Bird Flu - is an infectious viral disease in birds that spreads rapidly and can be transmitted from poultry to human.

HPAI is highly contagious and a recent surge in outbreaks has spurred global concern among the public and animal health communities.

Though more typical in birds, HPAI can also be transmitted to humans, most commonly through handling or consuming poorly cooked infected poultry. At first, symptoms in humans include fever, cough, running nose, and dyspnœa, but without immediate treatment, an infected person’s condition will quickly deteriorate and can lead to death.

Although the virus currently does not easily spread among humans, if the virus changes it could easily be spread like seasonal influenza.

Avian Influenza in Cambodia

Avian Influenza (AI) is a new disease and remains a serious threat in Cambodia. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries officially declared the first case of AI in Cambodia in January 2004.

Since then and until February 2013, there have been 39 outbreaks, resulting in the death or culling of over 80,000 poultry, and 29 human cases - 26 of which were fatal.

Since February 2013, Cambodia has had more HPAI cases and deaths than in all of 2012, making the country, globally, worst hit by the deadly virus so far this year. The Ministry of Health reported nine influenza cases, leading to eight deaths.

In addition to the health impacts on animals and humans, AI outbreaks cause economic impacts that threaten the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and the food security of their families.

In Cambodia, affected areas are concentrated mostly around the southern border with Vietnam and the occasionally with northeastern border with Thailand and include Phnom Penh, Kampong Speu, and Siem Reap.

Challenges to Prevention and Response

Minimizing the threat of HPAI to humans and domestic poultry means identifying and addressing the key challenges that Cambodia faces, which include:

1. Lack of bio-security measures (i.e. build fences on farm and keep poultry separated) and appropriate precautions at the local level
2. Backyard rearing - the production process of most smallholder farmers - leaves poultry exposed to wild birds, presenting a high risk of spreading disease
3. Limited bio-security measures in markets and farms
4. Shortage of timely reporting and diagnosis of the disease
5. Late reporting of sick and dead poultry
FAO’s Approach

FAO has been channelling its efforts through the *Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Surveillance Programme*, funded by USAID and the World Bank, which aims to control the emergence of AI and limit the economic costs of the disease and the potential for its spread to humans through reinforcement of capacities at different levels.

Leveraging its expertise, FAO’s strategy for AI addresses both prevention and response through capacity building of local authorities, villagers, private sector players (farm managers, middlemen, market sellers), and national officials.

The programme focuses on six main activities:

1. Strengthen capacity in disease surveillance
2. Strengthen laboratory diagnostic capacities
3. Reinforce capacity of authorities in containment operations for HPAI outbreaks
4. Promote bio-security in poultry production at the farm level
5. Improve public awareness on HPAI
6. Improve supportive and protective legislative environment in relation to HPAI

Key Achievements

Since beginning its activities on AI in Cambodia in 2006, FAO has achieved many successes including:

- Training of 8,000 Village Animal Health Workers (VAWHs) on surveillance, recognition and reporting techniques
- Training of 6,000 village chiefs in communicating key prevention messages to their communities
- Training of provincial and district level staff from the Department of Animal Health and Production (DAHP) on recognition and reporting processes
- Providing all VAWHs with Personal Protection Equipment kits, which include a mask, goggles, shovel, sprayer, gloves, plastic bags, and boots.
- Conducting 12 bio-security workshops for semi-commercial duck farm owners
- Organizing 17 market forums for poultry traders, middlemen and butchers to explain bio-security measures to apply
- Organizing 28 community forums for poultry producers to explain bio-security measures for farms
- Producing poster, hats, public service announcements, a karaoke video, and a documentary film to deliver community awareness messages across Cambodia
- In close collaboration with MAFF/DAHP, draft the Animal Health and Production Legislation

Future Strategies

FAO will continue to build the technical capacities of key stakeholders at all levels, with greater emphasis on support to the development and implementation of national policies designed to better equip Cambodia to prevent and respond to AI and other animal diseases.