

AVIAN INFLUENZA

Communication from Turkey

The following communication, received on 16 January 2006, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Turkey.

Introduction

1. The delegation of Turkey would like to inform the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures of the latest situation on avian influenza (AI) in Turkey. Since the process of identification of outbreaks, communications, and the taking of all necessary measures to control and eradicate the disease are still ongoing, this communication on AI in Turkey will be brief. Up-to-date information on various aspects of the disease prevalent in some provinces in Turkey is, and will be, available on the web sites of the related international expert organizations such as OIE, WHO, and FAO, as well as from the General Directorate of Protection and Control of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (www.kkgm@gov.tr).

2. Following three confirmed human cases and three deaths from Avian Influenza virus in Turkey, the highly pathogenic strain of the virus (H5N1) has been given greater attention and serious consideration. International public awareness has increased due to human cases and three deaths in eastern Anatolia and detection and confirmation of the disease in other provinces. Control measures to prevent the spread of the disease throughout Turkey have been on-going since the first detected case on 15 October 2005.

3. Because Turkey is situated in one of the major migration routes of wild migrating birds it is susceptible to the disease and faces infection risk at any time of any year. Unfavorable weather conditions and traditional farming practices, exacerbated by socio-economic factors, decrease the efforts and technical interventions to some extent while, at the same time, allowing the virus to live longer in the environment.

General review of the situation

4. AI outbreaks were first observed in Turkey on 5 October 2005 in the village Kiziksa of Manyas District of Balikesir Province in the north-western Anatolia. In this region some swamp areas host both native wild birds and seasonal migrating birds. The first outbreak of AI was controlled and eventually eradicated, through a series of measures based on the OIE terrestrial animal health code recommendations. Related international organizations, such as OIE, WHO, FAO, as well as related institutions of the European Union and neighboring countries, were immediately informed of the situation of the outbreak and measures taken, including preventive measures and control and eradication activities.

5. Subsequently, on 15 December 2005, a notification was received of suspected deaths of backyard poultry flock in Kopruler quartier (ward) of Aralik District of Igdır Province in the far-eastern Turkey. Testing of samples taken from the poultry suspected of being infected confirmed the presence of the H5N1 strain of the AI virus. These tests were conducted by national reference laboratory (Bornova Veterinary Control and Research Institute) on 26 December 2005 and the diagnosis was also confirmed by the Weybridge of England, OIE reference laboratory for AI on 7 January 2006.

6. AI outbreaks were detected in small open-range backyard poultry flocks and swamp areas through clinical and post mortem examinations. AI outbreaks were also confirmed through laboratory examinations by the national reference laboratory among wild birds susceptible to the disease in some other provinces in eastern Anatolia. Currently, 20 outbreaks in 13 provinces (out of the total 81 provinces in Turkey) have been scientifically confirmed to be caused by the H5N1 strain of AI virus. The provinces where positive cases recorded are Igdır, Erzurum, Sanliurfa, Erzincan, Agri, Bitlis, Yozgat, Ankara, Bursa, Istanbul, Van, Aydin, Kars. While there have been 32 suspected cases in 16 provinces that have not been confirmed AI positive, these case have been assumed to be AI positive and preventive and control measures have been implemented to address them. The provinces, where AI cases have not been confirmed, are Mus, Ardahan, Izmir, Isparta, Konya, Karaman, Siirt, Karabuk, Sivas, Bayburt, Elazig, Diyarbakir, Eskisehir, Mugla, Batman, Malatya.

7. Until 15 January 2006, 764.000 birds, almost all from small backyard flocks, had been killed and destroyed. All localities where outbreaks have been found to be positive for AI seem to be along migration routes of migrating birds.

8. AI has not been observed in commercially integrated medium- to large-sized poultry production enterprises in Turkey. This suggests that the source of infection is migratory birds that serve as a reservoir of the virus or dead infected birds.

9. Many available and potential measures are being taken, such as short term, rapid and effective measures in various aspects of the disease, as well as medium term measures. The events have also triggered long-term measures to be undertaken in coordination with international institutions.

Risk reduction and control interventions

10. Scientific disease prevention and control methods and measures have been on-going since the first outbreak of AI in north-western Anatolia and the second outbreak in eastern Anatolia. Close cooperation and collaboration with the Ministry of Health is an unavoidable consideration. An expert team has carried out field visits and held follow-up meetings with experts of related institutions in the country. An expert team from related international organizations has also carried out field trips and discussed the situation with the national authorities.

11. Risk reduction and control interventions imposed include:

- Establishment of protection zones within a 3 km radius and surveillance zones within a 7 km radius around the infected village and/or premises;
- Stamping out all susceptible bird animals in the control zone established in 3 km radius around the outbreak and compensating the losses. All animals dead, infected and susceptible of being infected within the control zone were destroyed and buried with lime in a pit on the ground;
- Disinfection in and around of infected premises and establishments, as well as those premises and establishments suspected of being infected;

- Compulsory dipping and spraying of vehicles going out (exiting) and coming in (entering) infected zones and/or surveillance zones;
- Quarantine and bio-security measures in and around the control and surveillance zones;
- Control of movement of all kind of animals inside the country is tightened and banning of movements of susceptible species within the country;
- Surveillance of the wildlife reservations and swamp areas; and
- Continuous clinical and serological surveillance around the outbreaks and/or suspected cases and within the potentially sensitive areas.

Administrative and financial measures taken include:

- Activation of regional and national contingency planning. Implementation of risk management practices;
- Activation of high alert status of national and local disease control centers;
- Increased and tightened of bio-security measures through the country;
- Immediate and on-going provision of information about the occurrence of the disease to all related international organizations and neighboring countries;
- Raising of public awareness through all available means of communications, mainly by media published and/or broadcast nationally and regionally;
- Prohibition of vaccinations;
- Training of technical staff and increasing the capacity of veterinary services through various means including continuous working hours;
- Allocation and mobilization of financial resources, in addition to the existing budgetary allocations; and
- Temporary prohibition of hunting in the country until the second announcement.

12. Follow-up reports to the related international organizations on all preventive and control measures taken and experience gained will be communicated thoroughly. The SPS Committee will also be informed.
