

**AVIAN INFLUENZA**

Communication from Colombia in the meeting held on 24 October 2005

The following communication, received on 31 October 2005, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Colombia.

1. My delegation wishes to submit an explanatory communication on the situation in Colombia with regard to avian influenza, in connection with a recent notification by Ecuador in document G/SPS/N/ECU/7 dated 14 October 2005, from which it is not clear what measure is being applied to Colombia, reference merely being made to two domestic resolutions Nos. 024 and 025.
2. The *Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario* – ICA (Colombian Agricultural Institute) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, through a process of active epidemiological surveillance, has detected the presence of subtype H9 of the avian influenza virus, a low pathogenic subtype, in three poultry farms in the municipality of El Fresno, department of Tolima, in the centre of the country. The number of birds in the poultry farms affected is 497,500, none of which have shown symptoms of the disease or changes in their production parameters. The birds are breeders used for the production of eggs for hatching.
3. This finding is the result of the active epidemiological surveillance measures carried out by the ICA in coordination with the Colombian National Federation of Poultry Farmers (FENAVI), which is one of the main activities carried out under the National Programme for the Prevention of Exotic Diseases, involving screening for the disease by taking and analysing samples, on the basis of a statistical design, in the country's commercial poultry farms. In the course of this year, 17,580 samples have been taken, against a total of about 60,000 in the last five years.
4. In the context of the active epidemiological surveillance exercise, 1,386 samples from the department of Tolima have so far been taken and analysed, 598 of them from the farms affected. In addition, as part of the epidemiological tracing measures in the area affected, 1,318 samples have been taken in 452 farms in the vicinity of premises affected, and the virus has not yet been found in any other farms.
5. The ICA, in collaboration with FENAVI, has determined the actions needed to confine the virus to the three farms affected, through the imposition of a quarantine, which will be maintained until the virus has been shown to be absent. In each of the farms affected a control point has been set up, which operates around the clock to guarantee that the measures are applied. Similarly, movements of farm workers to and from the farms have been restricted and strict biosecurity measures are being applied on these premises.

6. While the quarantine remains in effect, no type of poultry will be permitted to enter the affected farms. The sheds are also being cleaned and disinfected, and bedding and waste materials treated and destroyed. The active surveillance measures are continuing in the rest of the country, and no instances of the presence of the virus have been recorded in any other part of the national territory.

7. In addition, the ICA, the Ministry of Social Welfare and the National Health Institute have sent a team of doctors, veterinarians and epidemiologists to the affected area, who are conducting surveillance measures among the workers on the farms affected and in the vicinity and training the local public health authorities and health services providers, as a prevention, monitoring and control measure.

8. The farms affected were sampled by the National Programme for the Prevention of Exotic Diseases on 7 September 2005 and diagnosed as positive on 14 and 15 September. The techniques used were ELISA, agar gel immune diffusion (AGID) test and haemoagglutination (HA) inhibition; subsequently, on 22 September, these tests were applied again, together with PCR and Directigen, and the virus was isolated. Samples were also sent for further study in official reference laboratories in the United States with a view to determining the neuraminidase, the pathogenicity index and the lineage of the virus.

9. On 20 October 2005 advance notification was received of the analyses carried out by the United States reference laboratory (National Veterinary Services Laboratories – NVSL) on the serums, and of those carried out on the virus isolates in the National Laboratory of Veterinary Diagnostics of the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA-CEISA). The serums tested positive for the H9N2 virus, and the isolates tested positive for the type A influenza virus using the RRT-PCR test, and negative for the H5 and H7 viruses. Other complementary techniques are currently being applied.

10. The subtype H9 strain identified is endemic in various regions of the world and represents a significantly lower risk to human and animal health than subtypes H5 and H7. Following confirmation of the presence of H9 avian influenza virus, all the Colombian health authorities and the poultry farmers' union have been informed, with a view to formulating an integrated response to the situation.

11. It should be stressed that the Colombian health authorities have consistently given priority to the principle of transparency, by giving notification of the presence of the low pathogenic avian influenza virus, even though there is no obligation to notify the competent international organizations of this virus subtype pursuant to Chapter 2.7.12 of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code – 2005 of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

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