

## Avian Influenza

### Strategies adopted by Mauritius

A National Emergency Preparedness Committee comprising Government officials and the private sector has been set up and has been meeting regularly since November 2004.

As from 2005, the Committee chaired by the Principal Veterinary Officer held monthly meetings to follow evolution of the disease when it first appeared in South East Asia. With the evolution of the disease affecting certain European and Baltic countries, the Committee has started meeting on a weekly basis as from November 2005. The Committee is closely monitoring the spread of the disease worldwide, in particular African countries and the outbreak that has occurred in India during the last months. The Committee is closely monitoring the movement of migratory birds and the biological samples are being collected for detection of Avian Flu virus. The surveillance also includes on wild local birds (Pigeons, Mynas, Parrots), domestic poultry (industrial and backyard), exotic and wild birds of Casela and Le Val Nature Park.

A National Contingency Plan has been put in place and is constantly being updated following the pattern of the disease and its occurrence.

In so far as the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life is concerned, an “Avian Influenza Preparedness Plan” has been prepared since March 2006 in line with WHO recommendations. In this plan, the following aspects have already been included:

- Increased surveillance at Port and Airport
  - Advice to travellers visiting affected regions (e.g to refrain visiting poultry farms and markets where poultry are being sold in these countries)
  - Indication of isolation Wards in all Regional Hospitals, in case of emergency.
  - Visits by Health Inspectors to poultry farms to ensure proper husbandry practices and to report abnormal deaths of poultry
  - Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment as per WHO guidelines
  - Stockpiling of Anti-Viral drugs
- 160,500 treatment doses of Oseltamivir are available
- Control practices in Health Care Facilities have been reinforced.
  - Continuing Medical Education for Medical and Paramedical Staff
  - Regular samples of throat swabs were taken by the Virology Laboratory as a surveillance measure.
  - Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and Rapid Tests for diagnosis of Avian Influenza at the Virology Laboratory

Furthermore, the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life has prepared protocols, guidelines and recommendations for:

- Airline flight crew
- Persons meeting passengers arriving from areas with Avian Influenza
- Airline cleaning crew and maintenance crew
- Baggage/package and cargo handlers for airlines returning from regions affected by Avian Influenza.

In addition, preventive measures to restrict entry of the disease have already been implemented such as ban on importation of live birds and poultry products from certain countries. Vigilance at ports of entry has been reinforced. Foot dips with virucidals have already been placed at our ports of entry. Private shipping agents have been issued a communiqué to implement a foot dip with virucidal on their ships. Ship inspection forms are being faxed to the Mauritius Ports Authority by the plant quarantine on a regular basis. Passengers in touch with poultry or farms during their outward visits are being screened by the Ministry of Health which is working in close collaboration with the Plant and Quarantine Services of the Ministry of Agro Industry and Fisheries. Pamphlets have already been prepared by the Ministry of Health for distribution to outgoing passengers.

The sanitary officers of the Ministry of Health and the Quarantine Officers of the Ministry of Agro Industry are also on the alert. Among steps taken and recommended in the Contingency Plan, we have already imported necessary equipment such as protective clothing, disinfectants and biological tests kits.

A consignment of 225,000 doses of vaccines against Avian Flu in poultry has already been received. A vaccination program has been worked out in consultation with International Institutions like the World Animal Health and F.A.O and will be implemented.

Our Veterinary Officers have recently attended workshops on Avian Influenza in Pretoria and Libreville under the sponsorship of the SADC, World Animal Health, FAO and WHO. Our services are in constant contact with International Experts who have visited Mauritius recently and participated in the meetings of the Avian Influenza Committee.

A simulation exercise was organised on Saturday 06 May 2006 to test and validate Emergency Operational Measures. The response from all stakeholders was prompt and effective and the exercise was correctly done and successful. A similar exercise will be carried out, this time targeting a large industrial poultry farm.

The Ministry of Agro Industry and Fisheries and the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life have devised communication strategies in order to create awareness on Avian Flu among poultry breeders, health workers and the general public. Officers of AREU are educating poultry breeders on biosecurity measures to be taken in the context of Avian Flu. 2000 information sheets have been prepared and distributed to poultry breeders. Officers of both Ministries have

been participating in radio and television programs to inform the public about Avian Flu and preventive measures to be taken.

The National Emergency Preparedness Committee is chaired by the Principal Veterinary Officer and comprises the representatives of following institutions:-

- Representative of Prime Minister's Office
- Ministry of Agro Industry and Fisheries
- Ministry of Health and Quality of Life
- Ministry of Local Government
- Ministry of Environment
- Police Department
- Special Mobile Force
- Road Traffic Management Unit
- Plant Quarantine Services
- Agricultural Research and Extension Unit
- Poultry Breeding Centre
- Airports of Mauritius Limited
- Mauritius Ports Authority
- Mauritius Customs,
- Outer Islands Development Corporation
- National Parks and Conservation Unit
- Major Private stakeholders from the poultry industry.