



Influenza A (H1N1) Update Lao PDR



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ISSUE 2

HIGHLIGHTS

- Globally, there are 11,034 officially reported human cases of Influenza A (H1N1)
- Government response efforts address 5 key areas
- The Influenza A (H1N1) virus is not known to be transmissible to people through eating processed pork or other food products derived from pigs. Nevertheless, pork meat/product should be well cooked.
- Meat from sick pigs or pigs found dead should not be processed or used for human consumption under any circumstances.
- There continue to be no known *suspected* or *confirmed* human cases of Influenza A (H1N1) in Lao PDR.

What is the difference between avian influenza, swine influenza and human influenza viruses?

Avian influenza viruses, swine influenza viruses, and human influenza viruses all belong to the same class of viruses known as Orthomyxoviruses.

Avian influenza viruses circulate in wild and sometimes also in domestic bird populations. Certain sub-types, including the highly pathogenic H5N1, are occasionally transmitted to mammals, including humans.

Swine influenza viruses circulate in swine populations and are occasionally transmitted to birds and to humans.

Human influenza viruses circulate in human populations and are transmitted from person to person. Human influenza viruses are also transmissible to animals, in particular to pigs.

Pigs can therefore harbour viruses from both avian and human sources and act as "mixing vessels" for these viruses. An example of humans infecting pigs is the recent case reported by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) on 2 May 2009.

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Useful Contacts for Information

NEIDCO (National Emerging Infectious Disease Coordination Office) - **previously NAHICO**

For answering questions and reporting cases of Influenza-like illness and animal sickness or death.

Free Hotline Telephone: 166

Technical queries in the Lao PDR

National Centre for Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE)

Hotline Telephone: 021 350 209

National Animal Health Center (NAHC)

Telephone: 021 216 380

World Health Organization (WHO)

Email: commdiseaseinfo.lao@wpro.who.int

Hotline Telephone: 020 514 1105

Web based information

WHO websites

www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu (Global updated information)

www.who.int/ith/updates (International Travel and Health)

FAO website

<http://www.fao.org/ag/Influenza-A-H1N1.html>

General information on UN Coordination measures in the Lao PDR

Office of the UN Resident Coordinator

Telephone: 021 267750 and 267748

Website: www.unlao.org/

Current Situation

The situation continues to evolve. As of 21 May 2009, 41 countries had officially reported a total of 11,034 cases of Influenza A (H1N1), with 85 deaths. WHO continues to focus on surveillance to detect signs of sustained community spread and on limiting the impact of the virus, both on individuals and communities.

Laos' neighbours have confirmed cases: China (mainland 8, Hong Kong 3), Thailand (2); and, cases in Japan are continuing to rise, with at least 259 confirmed cases. Japan has closed schools in three prefectures as a result.

A number of countries are urging WHO to raise the current Phase 5 to the highest Phase 6. On 19 May, the WHO Director General responded, "The definition of phase change was constructed with H5N1 in mind, which was a very toxic virus with 50-60% mortality rate. This new virus [is very different]. It is so far mostly mild and self limiting...Remember that Phase 6 only considers the geographic spread and does not take into account severity." The Phase remains at 5 but the situation is being closely monitored.

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The CFIA announced that it had found H1N1 flu virus in a swine herd in Alberta, and that it was highly probable that the pigs were exposed to the virus from a worker who had recently returned from Mexico and had been exhibiting flu-like symptoms.

What is Swine Flu?

Swine influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses. Regular outbreaks of swine flu are common in pigs but rare in humans. Pigs infected with swine influenza viruses show symptoms of coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, fever, and breathing difficulty. Reproductive problems such as abortion can also occur. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from human-to-human, but in the past only a few people were infected.

People who work with pigs, especially people with intense exposure, are at risk of catching swine influenza if the pigs are infected with the rare strains that can be passed to humans. The spread of the virus among pigs is controlled through movement control and biosecurity measures.

Because the disease has very mild effects on swine, there is currently no justification for measures such as culling pigs or the imposition of trade measures on the importation of pigs or pig-related products.

Is it safe to handle or eat pork?

The risk of infection of H1N1 virus through eating pork has never been established. If influenza viruses are present, they are rapidly killed when meat is cooked. There are no specific precautions to take other than the usual guidance of practicing good hygiene during preparation of meat or pork products. The meat from sick pigs or pigs found dead should not be processed or used for human consumption under any circumstances.

Which global organizations deal with influenza diseases in animals?

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) are mandated to deal with global outbreaks in animals, commonly called epizootics or panzootics (equivalent of epidemics and pandemics in humans)

What animal health measures is FAO recommending?

Surveillance for porcine respiratory disease should be intensified and all cases of porcine influenza-like symptoms should immediately be reported to national veterinary authorities.

Animal handlers and veterinarians should wear protective clothing to minimize risk of being infected.

People who work directly with swine should be urged not to go to work if they have any signs of respiratory disease, fever or any influenza-like illness.

Emerging Issues concerning the Influenza A (N1H1) in humans and animals

Influenza viruses, whether in humans or among animals, are constantly evolving genetically, along with changes in their ability to cause sickness and death in humans or animals. These changes may be gradual or very rapid.

Strong surveillance and constant monitoring of suspicious events, especially in poultry and pigs, is critical for forecasting disease emergence and the prevention and control of new infectious diseases.

Influenza viruses are capable of transmitting from humans to animals, as seen to be the case in the farm in Canada. Good biosecurity and hygiene practices are critical for preventing transmission from humans to animals or vice-versa.

The occurrence of outbreaks of the new A/H1N1 influenza virus in pigs or flu-like symptoms in swine should be reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and FAO.

Response of the Government and Development partners in the Lao PDR

The Prime Minister has led the campaign to protect Lao PDR from a potential Influenza A (H1N1) outbreak. The Prime Minister directed the National Communicable Diseases Control Committee and the Ministry of Health to act on this issue as a matter of urgency. In response to this directive, the two agencies have put in place measures in the following core areas:

Coordination and Policy-Making

- NEIDCO and the Ministry of Health held meetings with the all directors of Provincial Health Departments and the directors of Provincial Hospitals to review preparedness and effective prevention measures for Influenza A/H1N1. The meeting was held in Vientiane Capital on 14 to 15 May 2009 and supported by the World Bank.
- NEIDCO is currently operating seven days a week to ensure all pandemic and response actions are in place.

Surveillance and Reporting

- Strengthened surveillance for influenza-like illnesses in the provinces through the establishment of a daily reporting to the National Centre for Laboratory and Epidemiology (NCLE), supported by WHO.
- Daily reports from border screening at Wattay Airport and the Friendship Bridge are being received and monitored.
- Operators of the national toll-free 166 hotline have been equipped with information on the emerging situation and are available to reply to questions and reports of H1N1.
- Pig farmers noticing influenza-like illnesses in their pigs are advised to inform, directly or through village veterinary worker (VVW) or village chiefs:
 - the Livestock Unit of the District Agriculture and Forestry Office; or
 - the national 166 hotline.



NEIDCO meeting with Provincial Directors of Health Departments and Hospitals, and their partners UN agencies, and World Bank. 14-15 May 2009 Vientiane

Clinical Management and Infection Control

- Training courses have been developed with support from WHO for doctors and nurses at national and regional levels in clinical management of A/H1N1 and H5N1 (avian influenza) and infection control in hospitals. This will support diagnosis and treatment of potential cases.
- Protocols for triage and handling of influenza like illness cases in hospitals and healthcare centres have been updated through work with the department of Curative Medicine and WHO.
- Arrangements have been made by the Government to distribute Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and Tamiflu™ to 17 provincial and central hospitals.

Public Health Measures

- Border screening has commenced with all visitors coming into Lao PDR through international airports and the Friendship Bridge currently filling in health monitoring forms and receiving brochures with health tips and hotline numbers. Supported by the World Bank, WHO, and Office of the Resident Coordinator (UNORC)..
- The Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF), with the support of FAO, has informed all provinces about Influenza A/H1N1 and its characteristics. Advice was given to all Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Offices to enable them to take necessary actions which include: disease investigation; control measures in case of influenza-like disease in pigs (for instance

- This month saw the arrival in Lao PDR of 9240 extra doses of the antiviral drug Tamiflu™ from WHO Headquarters for use against Influenza A/H1N1.
- NEIDCO is overseeing distribution of stockpiles of UNICEF-supported pandemic flu prevention and flu care materials through networks of Government staff and UN partners.
- Prevention and information posters in English are being prepared for airports, hotels and guesthouses.
- NEIDCO Director interviewed by Lao Star Television on May 13.
- Two radio and two TV spots featuring flu prevention and care messages explained by doctors are being aired regularly from 26 May.
- UNICEF and WHO have prepared sets of *questions & answers* for media and provincial health education units and supplied provincial media with copies of print and audiovisual pandemic flu messaging materials.
- All major newspapers are running columns and advertisements on flu prevention and care.
- A bi-weekly national radio call-in programme on Avian Influenza (AI) supported by UNICEF has shifted to discussions and messages on flu prevention, care and pandemic preparedness.
- Weekly radio programmes in ethnic Hmong and Khmu languages are broadcasting influenza messages translated from Lao.
- On 6-7 May, a media briefing was conducted for print, TV and radio journalists at Ministry of Information and Culture with technical support from UNICEF, WHO and FAO.

Communications

- The Government has held a meeting with private sector companies in order to disseminate information about Influenza A/H1N1.
- The Provincial Health Department of Vientiane Capital carried out public awareness campaigns at the markets and the bus station.
- The Ministry of Information and Culture has held, with the support of FAO, UNICEF and WHO, two media orientation seminars with journalists from TV, radio and newspapers to ensure clear understanding of Influenza A/H1N1.
- Regular UN, NGO and government communications meetings are being coordinated through the AHI IEC Taskforce with assistance of UNICEF.

Issued by:

National Emerging Infectious Disease Coordination Office (NEIDCO) in close collaboration with the UN Office of the Resident Coordinator.

Telephone contacts: NEIDCO - 012 264324/5 and UNORC - 021 267750 and 021 267748