

Notes from Dr. David Nabarro, Senior United Nations System Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza

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There is an increasing consensus on the Strategy that has to be adopted

- 1 better control the current epidemic of avian influenza,
- 2 prevent – or at least delay – the next influenza pandemic,
- 3 respond to the pandemic effectively when it does come.

There is increasing political momentum for implementation – at country, regional and intergovernmental levels.

Governments and the international community now face substantial challenges

Challenge 1: Improve animal health infrastructure to reduce the scale of the epidemic, and to stamp out, promptly, any new outbreaks.

Key elements are

- nation-wide surveillance capacity to detect animal disease,
- improvements in bio-security to keep potentially sick birds away from other animals and humans,
- effective culling and disposal of diseased birds,
- systems to implement vaccination programmes and compensation for those who lose their flocks.

The Ministry of Agriculture takes the lead, with support from other Ministries and Departments. Technical know how is available from FAO and OIE, and through bilateral agreements. Fiscal and institutional backing is available from the development banks. Other parts of the UN system can provide support for governance, community-level action, logistics and communication.

Challenge 2: Cross sectoral preparations for the next influenza pandemic:

All countries are vulnerable to a pandemic: preparedness requires single-minded efforts, by government and other stakeholders, to reduce vulnerability with an emphasis on actions that will be most effective

Normally, a high level point person within government leads a cross departmental process with guidance from experienced contingency planners. Table-top simulations help to bring focus and exercises are used to test preparedness

Challenge 3: Contingency planning for pandemic response:

UN country teams are working with governments to understand expectations and establish roles in the event of a pandemic. Resident coordinators want to be explicit about what is expected of the UN system in country and prepare essential UN staff for the roles expected of them. They will pay full attention to the safety of both essential and non-essential staff. The dialogue, within government, is likely to focus on the roles of front line personnel in the response, on their protection, on size and use of medicine stockpiles (including oseltamivir, or Tamiflu), on systems to make care available and keep hospital and other essential services running, and on ensuring supplies of protective clothing (including masks) and effective vaccines

Challenge 4: Building stocks of essential medicines and health care consumables

Governments want to be sure that those most in need (eg front line personnel tackling avian and pandemic influenza) can access antivirals, other medicines and goods essential for maintaining health. They will seek advice on what is needed and how these needs should be accessed, on

systems to them to where needed, and support to ensure that they are properly used. How might these mechanisms change as the pandemic advances? They also want help on whether or not to be trying to develop – or at least purchase – their own vaccine stocks.

Challenge 5: Partnerships and networks that function, linking the UN system to private groups – for profit and not for profit (NGOs)

Private entities can help improve veterinary health surveillance, as well as detection of and response to sickness, through upholding standards, building capacity, rewarding performance and improving impact. They have a key role in engaging community organizations and stimulating key changes in behaviour. The humanitarian Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) will have a key role to play in coordinating multi-agency support for pandemic response

Challenge 6: Ensuring consistency of public communications about influenza issues in a way that permits individual visibility but respects a single set of messages and interpretations. These are reflected in both national and international media relations.

Challenge 7: Establish clear and sustainable support for country efforts on avian and pandemic influenza which offers finance, know how and supplies **in ways that are** accessible to all major stakeholders The most urgent need is to fund avian influenza work.

Challenge 8: Ensure that the FAO/WHO/World Bank/OIE 7th to 9th November meeting yields a programme of work which will benefit communities that face the greatest risks and suffering by taking stock of country priorities in Asia, Middle East, Africa and Europe, and agreeing global priorities; and then establishing key elements of the response, and agreeing how they best be pursued and then monitored.

The UN system Influenza Coordination Office will support organizations of the UN system as they help governments rise to these challenges. Coordination is not a luxury. If we work together we have a chance of containing the next pandemic. If not, the odds become so much lower.