

III. Control of Avian Influenza

Because feces and other excretions can spread the H5N1 virus, control of infected birds is critical in preventing the spread of AI. It is believed that only the immediate and rapid depopulation of Hong Kong's entire poultry population in 1997 reduced the further transfer of the virus to humans and averted a pandemic. This was the first time that AI was documented as transferring directly to humans.

The current outbreak began in 2003 and is extremely concerning because the current H5N1 virus has proven to be more lethal and survive longer when compared to the H5N1 which caused the concern in Hong Kong in 1997. This virus has expanded into other hosts and is affecting other mammals previously considered resistant.

A. International Controls

AI and the possibility of a pandemic has been a concern in the world community for many years. Countries have actually been monitoring influenza outbreaks for many decades. This is coordinated through the World Health Organization (WHO), which is part of the United Nations. Other international organizations working with WHO in the control of a possible influenza pandemic include the Food and Agriculture Organization as well as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).¹⁹ In conjunction with these international organizations, many countries have developed influenza pandemic plans.

1. World Health Organization

The WHO was established as the United Nations specialized agency for health. WHO's objective is "the attainment of all peoples of the highest possible level of health."²⁰ The WHO was set up in 1948. In 1952, the WHO Global Surveillance Network for monitoring influenza outbreaks was established. WHO's Global Influenza Surveillance Network has four WHO Collaborating Centers (WHO CCs) as well as 112 institutions in 83 countries – WHO National Influenza Centers (NICs).

Each of the NICs collect influenza specimens in their respective countries, perform primary analysis and antigenic characterizations. These strains are then shipped to the WHO CCs which perform high-level antigenic and genetic analysis. These results form the basis of WHO recommendations for influenza vaccine compositions each year.

¹⁹ The WHO only intervenes in countries threatened by disease when invited to do so; and the FAO monitors livestock and crop production, but it is not mandated to monitor any threats from wild animals or plants and the OIE monitors livestock health and trade issues.

²⁰ World Health Organization, "About WHO" at: <http://www.who.int/about/en/>