

Women's Commission

Prevention of Avian Influenza: Consultation on Long Term Direction to Minimize the Risk of Human Infection

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' views on the Government's long term direction to minimize the risk of human infection of avian influenza.

Background

2. Hong Kong has experienced four highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza outbreaks in poultry since 1997. Human infection of H5N1 was detected in the 1997 outbreak in which 18 persons developed the disease, of whom 6 died subsequently.

3. The recent outbreaks of avian influenza in poultry across Asia are unprecedented and the human infections in Vietnam and Thailand have aroused great concerns over the risk of avian influenza viruses jumping across species to infect humans. It is likely that avian influenza would become endemic in poultry in the region. The current preventive and surveillance measures are not foolproof. Indeed, retail outlets that sell live poultry pose the greatest risk. There is a need to put in place further measures to prevent human infection of avian influenza.

The Consultation Paper

4. On 2 April 2004, the Government published a consultation paper entitled "Prevention of Avian Influenza : Consultation on Long Term direction to Minimize the Risk of Human Infection".

5. Chapter 2 of the paper outlines the Government's long-term vision to further protect public health from avian influenza, i.e., to sustain the goal of zero infection and transmission in Hong Kong. To achieve this long-term vision, it is our policy to separate humans from live poultry. Chapter 3 of the paper summarizes the current measures to prevent avian influenza. This is then followed by an analysis of the potential health risk despite these measures in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 of the paper then outlines various immediate and medium term improvement measures to further reduce the potential threat of avian influenza to humans. Although these measures are necessary and desirable, they are insufficient in achieving our policy objective of separating

humans from live poultry. Hence, the Government has identified two strategic approaches to achieve the policy objective which are set out in Chapter 6 of the paper. These approaches are -

Approach A : All live poultry will be slaughtered and undergo chilling process in a slaughterhouse. Retail outlets would only be allowed to sell chilled poultry (“cold-chain approach”).

Approach B : All live poultry will be slaughtered and dressed at regional slaughtering hubs. Consumers can purchase freshly slaughtered chickens from the retail outlets located at the slaughtering hubs or have them delivered to their homes/restaurants by vehicles with refrigeration facilities (“freshly slaughtered chicken approach”).

6. The Government would like to gauge the public’s views on these approaches. We will take full account of the views received during the consultation period, which will end on 2 July 2004, before making a final decision on the strategic approach.

Views Sought

7. Members are invited to give their views on the following –

- (a) Whether the concept of “cold-chain” should be applied to the sale of poultry meat at retail outlets; and
- (b) Whether “freshly slaughtered chickens” should replace the sale of live poultry at retail outlets.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
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