

Important Health Notice

Information for Healthcare Professionals

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Update on Avian Influenza in Asia and Sporadic cases of SARS in China

Dear Colleagues:

Attached please find an update on the Avian Influenza A cases in humans with ongoing outbreaks in poultry flocks in Asia. A summary of SARS cases is also included.

This information is based on the updated Health Canada Alert and Recommendations issued on January 29, 2004.

The main change in the updated alert relates to the frequent changes in the areas/countries currently experiencing animal outbreaks or human cases of H5N1. The list of affected countries will now be maintained on Health Canada's website; attached is a table of current affected areas.

A travel advisory has also been issued by Health Canada for outgoing passengers.

Determining if a patient or client with Febrile Respiratory Illness (FRI)/Influenza like Illness has traveled to the affected geographic areas and consequent reporting of severe FRI or ILI to the local medical officer of health will greatly assist the public health management of a possible case of avian influenza. The table on page 3 should be used with the Febrile Respiratory Illness Screener distributed on January 23, 2004 to assist health care providers in FRI surveillance.

Please ensure that health care staff are aware of the information in this *Important Health Notice* and patients and clients re screened for FRI as indicated. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care continues to monitor the global SARS/Avian Flu situation closely; additional information will be provided to health care providers as soon as it is available.

Yours truly,

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Summary of Health Canada Alert and Recommendations re: Sporadic cases of SARS in China and avian influenza A (H5N1) in humans, Viet Nam and Thailand with ongoing H5N1 outbreaks in poultry flocks in Asia

CHANGES IN THIS UPDATE:

Countries affected by Avian influenza – Screening Area Expanded to Asia

- For consistency and ease of screening by health care practitioners and hospitals, we recommend increased vigilance/screening of persons linked to affected areas in **Asia**, in particular to countries experiencing confirmed influenza A (H5N1) avian influenza outbreaks in poultry and/or cases in humans
- Given frequent changes in the areas/countries currently experiencing animal or animal/human outbreaks of H5N1, the list of affected countries will now be maintained on Health Canada's website at: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgsp/h5n1/index.html>

You may also wish to consult your local public health department.

Additional information on laboratory testing

With respect to suspicion of possible avian influenza/severe ILI (Influenza like illness), when in doubt, test for influenza as soon as possible. Viral culture, (nasopharyngeal swabs are preferred), preferably within 48 hours of onset of symptoms.

Note: to assist laboratory staff in prioritizing testing, doctors should be advised to make a notation of positive travel history (e.g. recent return from Asia, in particular from an affected area, or known close contact of a person with such travel history) or other notation of increased suspicion (hospitalization, death) as a comment on the laboratory requisition form.

Summary:

This alert is an integrated response to recent severe respiratory illnesses of international public health importance, including avian influenza A (H5N1) and SARS.

These recommendations are aimed at increasing vigilance among all health care providers, public health practitioners and laboratories across Canada, while continuing enhanced surveillance for severe respiratory illness (SRI) in hospitals (FRI in Ontario).

Continued enhanced surveillance in hospitals is recommended for severe respiratory illness (including severe ILI) in persons linked to avian flu-affected areas as well as SARS-affected areas.

Recommendations to Health Care providers are unchanged:

- be alert for travel history (and likelihood of contact with poultry or swine) in patients with severe clinical presentation/unexpected outcome in otherwise healthy persons
- collect clinical samples from patients with severe ILI
- report severe ILI to the Medical Officer of Health for further investigation and management

For definitions of "SRI" and "ILI", see the previous Health Notice (January 23, 2004)

Highlights of the advisory for outbound travelers

- full text is posted on Health Canada's Travel Medicine website at: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgsp/tmp-pmv/pub_e.html

HC advises that travelers to China, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea and Japan not consume undercooked poultry, raw eggs or lightly cooked egg products.

Travelers should avoid unnecessary contact with live poultry. This includes poultry farms as well as markets where live animals such as chickens, ducks and pigs are sold. Transmission of infection from birds to humans is greatest in persons having close contact with live, infected poultry.

Travelers are advised to not bring poultry or egg products from these affected countries into Canada.

Travelers are further advised to maintain high standards of hygiene, including thorough hand washing, particularly after having contacted eggs or undercooked poultry and egg products.

Travelers who become sick or feel unwell with respiratory or flu-like symptoms on their return should seek a medical assessment with their personal physician. Travelers should inform their physician without being asked, that they have been traveling or living outside of Canada, and where they have been.

Travelers who have visited a farm while in an affected country should ensure that clothing and footwear worn on the farm are free from soil and manure before entering Canada. Clothing should be laundered and footwear should be disinfected after arrival.

Additional Information Sources for Avian influenza (H5N1):

The latest postings from WHO, are available at:

WHO

<http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>

WHO,WPRO

http://www.wpro.who.int/public/press_release/Press_List.asp

A detailed fact sheet on avian influenza (H5N1) issued by the WHO is available at:

http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/

Additional Information Sources for SARS:

There is no change in the number of confirmed SARS cases.

The latest postings from WHO are available at:

WHO

<http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/>

WHO,WPRO

http://www.wpro.who.int/public/press_release/Press_List.asp

**Areas in the zone of emergence/
re-emergence for SARS and avian influenza
(H5N1)**

| SARS | | |
|--|------------------------|--------------|
| Confirmed SARS CoV in humans (December 2003 - present) | | |
| Location | Total # of human cases | Total deaths |
| Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), China | 2 | 0 |
| Potential zone of re-emergence (November 2002 - June 2003) | | |
| Mainland China, Taiwan Province and Hong Kong SAR | n/a | n/a |
| Avian influenza (H5N1) | | |
| Confirmed human cases and poultry outbreaks (October 2003 - present) | | |
| Location | Total # of human cases | Total deaths |
| Viet Nam | 8 | 6 |
| Thailand | 3 | 2 |
| Confirmed outbreaks in poultry only (October 2003 -present) | | |
| South Korea | n/a | n/a |
| Japan | n/a | n/a |
| Cambodia | n/a | n/a |
| China | n/a | n/a |
| Indonesia | n/a | n/a |
| Note: this table will be updated as new information becomes available | | |