

Pandemic influenza, and primarily avian influenza, is a serious concern for Egypt. Avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, is an infectious viral disease of birds. Not all avian influenza viruses infect humans; however some, such as H5N1, have caused serious infections in people.

In 2006 Egypt reported the first H5N1 case, and since then new outbreaks have occurred every year, making it one of the world's few endemic countries for the virus. Close to 200 cases have been recorded so far, with a case fatality rate of 36%. H5N1 remains a challenge to the health of Egypt.

With many of the approximately 40 000 poultry farms in Egypt lacking biosecure production systems, and a high prevalence of backyard farming, there is a threat of a major outbreak in the country's poultry production system. A large dependence on poultry as the main form of animal protein consumption in the normal diet means that highly pathogenic avian influenza also poses a significant threat to food security.

The Government of Egypt has taken the threat of pandemic influenza seriously and developed the National Influenza Pandemic Executive Committee (NIPEC). WHO offers technical support to the NIPEC and participated in the development of the Integrated National Plan for avian and pandemic influenza in response to the rapid spread of avian influenza and pandemic influenza, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

WHO supports the implementation of the National Plan through building capacity in surveillance and monitoring of human cases of avian influenza and ensuring a rapid response. WHO and FAO have established a platform for joint risk assessment on avian influenza where both epidemiological and virological surveillance data are shared regularly and a risk assessment report is developed.

WHO works with the MoHP to provide seasonal influenza vaccines to vulnerable groups, including health workers in fever and chest hospitals, people working in poultry farms, rapid response teams, veterinarians and pilgrims going to Saudi Arabia for Hajj.

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