

30th Conference of the Regional Commission for Europe

Catania, Italy, 3 to 7 October 2022

Final

Recommendation No. 2

Highly pathogenic avian influenza and vaccination

CONSIDERING THAT:

1. Over the last years, there has been substantive increased risk to the Region from annual waves of HPAI leading to large epidemics. Exceptional changes in risk profile for the Region from HPAI necessitates review of disease prevention and control options;
2. Spread to domestic poultry being initially introduced and mediated via migratory birds, and domestic poultry in turn can be a source of infection, the viruses are continuing to evolve in these populations and present an annual cyclical threat and continuous risk to poultry production and an existing challenge to identify protective vaccines;
3. HPAI has captured the attention of the international community due to the devastating consequences for the health and welfare of poultry in infected establishments, poultry industry, farmer's livelihoods, international trade, health of wild birds, and potential threat to human health. Furthermore the death and culling of millions of birds incurs huge cost to government and industry and have major impacts on society;
4. Conventional control strategies based on surveillance, stamping-out, movement restriction and biosecurity measures whilst achieving success in eliminating infection and return to freedom from infection may not now be sustainable and additional tools and options to prevent and mitigate infection may be required;
5. The *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)* recognises that vaccination can be used as an effective complementary control tool, part of a disease control programme and provides guidance on HPAI surveillance in vaccinated birds, to demonstrate freedom from HPAI and gathering evidence for the effectiveness of the vaccination program. Moreover, the standards on the requirements for vaccines are available in the *Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals (Terrestrial Manual)*, and on the surveillance methods for detecting infection in vaccinated flocks and vaccinated birds, as well as standards for surveillance and vaccination in the *Terrestrial Code*;
6. Experiences of large-scale vaccination to control and prevent HPAI at population level are limited, and a few Members apply different approaches to protection by vaccination with varying results, such as the routine vaccination of poultry targeting certain productions systems, protection of susceptible animals in zoological collections or emergency vaccination in response to outbreaks as an adjunct control measure;
7. Existing vaccines to HPAI have the potential to reduce disease, increase resistance to infection, limit virus shedding and reduce transmission but rarely are able to induce extended sterilising immunity in poultry. Moreover, several Members in the Region are currently undertaking vaccine discovery, using next generation vaccines, and efficacy studies covering a range of vaccine types to explore vaccine efficacy and response in different susceptible poultry species. Currently available vaccines lack proven effectiveness to cover all the needs in particular the capacity to match circulating viruses, protection of the main poultry species, and vaccines compatible with Differentiating Infected from Vaccinated Animals (DIVA) strategy; and
8. HPAI is identified as a regional 'priority disease' and regional and global initiatives are being developed such as under the GF-TADs to develop diseases strategies taking into account the evolution of diseases and Members' needs. The strategies must be based on the latest available scientific information and answer to several different criteria, including safety, efficiency, and economic viability.

THE REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. WOAHA, Members' Veterinary Authorities and WOAHA Reference Laboratories for avian influenza exchange information related to the development, testing and use of vaccines against HPAI and modelling activities that inform collective assessment of possible vaccination strategies and policy;
2. Members' Veterinary Authorities continue to review their HPAI prevention and control options that include strengthening biosecurity and surveillance which remain the cornerstone, and consider vaccination programmes to be part of an overarching control strategy and integrated in emergency plans, in compliance with the *Terrestrial Code* and the *Terrestrial Manual*;
3. Members maintain their surveillance efforts, the biosecurity measures at farm level, and continue timely reporting of avian influenza outbreaks in both poultry and non-poultry species. High quality of information is key to support early detection and rapid response to potential threats to both animal and public health;
4. Members' Veterinary Authorities ensure that surveillance in vaccinated populations is conducted to detect infection with wild type viruses, and have further interventions to stamp out to control infection in these vaccinated flocks;
5. Members encourage research institutions and vaccine manufacturers to invest and collaborate on research and development of new HPAI vaccines, in particular, in new generation vaccines that offer improved outcomes whilst enabling the application of DIVA programmes, adapted to different species of poultry and conduct vaccines quality controls in accordance with the standards in the *Terrestrial Manual*;
6. Members require careful selection of candidate vaccines informed by local factors (including risk assessments and implementation conditions) and local requirements. Vaccines used need to have assurance of efficacy on the bird species, against a diverse family of HPAI viruses (currently predominated by H5 HPAI viruses) with formal systems for regular review, appropriate regulatory control and licensing, together with flexibility to update as required;
7. WOAHA through the OFFLU (WOAHA-FAO network of expertise on animal influenza) develop a platform to provide up to date information to the Members, poultry sector, and poultry vaccine manufacturers on antigenic characteristic of circulating avian influenza viruses including comparison with vaccine antigens and to enhance capacity to collect information on surveillance data associated to vaccination programmes. This information will facilitate the selection of appropriate vaccines for poultry and updating of poultry vaccine antigens;
8. WOAHA assess the requirements and challenges for the establishment a WOAHA managed HPAI vaccine bank in the long term to support its Members in the control of HPAI;
9. FAO and WOAHA urgently revise the HPAI global strategy to support the regional efforts in the control and prevention of avian influenza viruses of high pathogenicity, including communication to relevant stakeholders and the general public; and
10. WOAHA to review standards on HPAI vaccination in the *Terrestrial Code* and *Terrestrial Manual* with a view to facilitate safe international trade of vaccinated animals and products thereof taking into account the latest scientific information available and the revised FAO/WOAHA Global HPAI Strategy.