GF-TADs
GLOBAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROGRESSIVE CONTROL OF TRANSBOUNDARY ANIMAL DISEASES

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Organisation for Animal Health
Founded as OIE

Standing Group of Experts on Highly Pathogenicity Avian Influenza for Europe

under the GF-TADs umbrella

Second Meeting (SGE HPAI-2)

30th September 2024, Samarkand, Uzbekistan

Recommendations

CONSIDERING THAT:

1. The establishment of the Standing Group of Experts on HPAI (SGE-HPAI) for Europe within the framework of the Regional GF-TADs was driven by the extraordinary changes in the risk profile of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) at regional and global levels. These changes highlighted the need for enhanced coordination among Members to review disease prevention and control measures. The SGE HPAI plays an important role in facilitating the exchange of epidemiological data, best practices and effective strategies. By adopting a One Health approach, the expert group aims to safeguard both animal and human health, to reduce the spread of HPAI and to mitigate the economic impact of the disease on Members throughout the region.

2. In recent years, Europe has faced an increase in the introduction of HPAI virus into poultry populations, driven by wild bird migration, resulting in increased outbreaks and significant economic losses. Although the virus continues to evolve and remains a threat to poultry production, the number of infected wild and domestic birds has decreased since the first SGE HPAI meeting. Despite this improvement, the risk of HPAI infection remains, with the potential for spillover to other animals and humans, as has been observed in other regions.

3. Awareness raising and education of all relevant stakeholders on the risks and consequences of HPAI in captive birds remains essential to ensure their active involvement in prevention, surveillance and preparedness activities. Effective surveillance systems for early detection in both wild and domestic birds are also essential to ensure timely reporting and rapid implementation of control measures. Farm-level biosecurity remains the foundation of disease prevention and is a key tool to prevent the introduction, development and spread of HPAI within bird populations and mammals. Strengthening these aspects will significantly improve the Region's ability to respond to HPAI threats in a coordinated and efficient manner.

4. In certain epidemiological contexts, vaccination can be an effective complement to other control strategies, as illustrated by successful vaccination programs in some countries, and that if properly implemented, vaccination should not be a barrier to safe trade.

5. A comprehensive regional policy for the rapid eradication and effective control of HPAI outbreaks in captive birds remains essential to protect human and animal health and to maintain safe trade practices. In line with this, FAO and WOAH have developed the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (2024-2033), which provides a strategic framework to guide regional efforts. This Global Strategy emphasises prevention, preparedness and coordinated response, and provides critical support to address the ongoing and evolving threats posed by HPAI.

6. One Health is a concept of high importance when there is a need to prevent diseases spreading between animals and humans and especially when reducing risk for pandemics.

THE REGIONAL GF-TADs SGE-HPAI FOR EUROPE RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. The SGE HPAI for Europe, established in 2023 within the framework of the regional GF-TADs, is recognised as an effective mechanism for coordinating activities between Members and international organisations, including FAO, WOAH and DG SANTE. To increase its impact and ensure a more comprehensive One Health approach, it is recommended that WHO/Europe and public health authorities be further involved in operational activities, recognising the zoonotic potential of the disease and risk for pandemics. In addition, contributions from UNEP and the environmental sector are encouraged to strengthen joint efforts to protect animal and human health, control disease spread and minimise economic losses throughout the region.

2. The GF-TADs regional secretariat, in strong coordination with partners and members facilitate the development of a two-year regional action plan to support the implementation of the HPAI Global Strategy in Europe based on priority needs expressed by Members with a One Health approach. The regional action plan should address support to implement biosecurity measures adapted to the different farming systems, enhanced surveillance in poultry, wild birds and mammals, implementation of international standards, sharing best practices on prevention and control measures, including vaccination, and of scientific knowledge regarding circulating strains

3. Members ensure appropriate level of surveillance for early warning, biosecurity measures at farm level, make use of the necessary tools to prevent the spread of the disease in kept animals and continue timely reporting of avian influenza outbreaks. Maintain vigilance and awareness for spillover of infection to other domestic species. In addition, surveillance needs to be engaged, in accordance with the risk, in mammalian species, in particular in carnivores, in areas with potential high environmental contamination with HPAI virus.

4. Laboratories in Members of the European Region should have access to sequencing platforms capable of generating complete genomes of HPAI viruses enabling effective tracking of their spread and monitoring of zoonotic mutation emergence. Alternatively, sharing HPAI-positive samples with WOAH Reference Laboratories (RLs) for avian influenza should be facilitated to ensure the timely generation of genetic data. Information resulted from genomic monitoring of avian influenza viruses should be timely published in relevant databases and shared with WOAH RLs, including data deposition in international publicly accessible databases to support early detection and rapid response to potential threats to both animal and public health.

5. Members of the European Region should continue to implement science-based risk assessments that assist veterinary services in maintaining a high level of animal health and ensuring safe international trade in accordance with WOAH international standards.

6. In case of zoonotic mutation emergence, decision making based on joint risk assessment in accordance with One Health Approach, is recommended.

7. Veterinary Authorities, in collaboration with avian influenza reference laboratories and collaborating centres, should effectively exchange information on the development, testing and use of vaccines against HPAI. This includes evaluation of vaccination strategies, ensuring the implementation of reliable vaccines and efficient surveillance in vaccinated populations capable of detecting virus infections.

8. Members encourage research institutions and vaccine manufacturers to invest and collaborate on research and development of effective and safe HPAI vaccines adapted to different species of poultry in accordance with the standards in the Terrestrial Manual; to further support and utilise the outputs of the international AIM (Avian Influenza Monitoring) programme to strengthen vaccine matching to contemporary and emerging viruses.