

***Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS)  
meeting and briefing on  
Regional Avian and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness  
Report***

Due to the recent avian influenza outbreak among poultry in the region, and specifically Palestine, Israel, Egypt and Jordan, Search for Common Ground held a meeting at the Jerusalem International YMCA on Wednesday April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006 with participants from the Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli ministries of health as well as representatives from the following countries and international agencies: Norway, Canada, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), European Commission, World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), World Veterinary Organization, Egypt, Italy, and UNICEF.

**Purpose:**

- To update the international community on the current situation in Palestine, Israel, Jordan, and Egypt regarding the avian influenza virus, increasing awareness that if the virus is not contained and eradicated from one area, it could lead to a regional catastrophe.
- To identify the gaps in national response capabilities and needs for a regional cooperation mechanism for the containment of the virus.
- To identify immediate humanitarian and regional assistance needed to eradicate this virus.

Health officials from Palestine, Israel, and Jordan as well as the WHO gave briefings on the current situation in the region. They all agreed that avian influenza is a regional humanitarian problem that can only be addressed by countries working in concert.

At the meeting a representative from the World Health Organization (WHO) assessment team to the Palestinian territory briefed on the current situation regarding avian influenza. The representative explained that there are no human cases of A.I reported in the Gaza strip, but that there were eight suspected human cases in which samples taken to laboratories in the UK came out negative. The culling process in Gaza has been completed and about 250,000 poultry have been culled. After assessing the situation in the Palestinian territory, the official explained that Palestine does not have the adequate laboratory technology as well as enough protective equipments to prevent the virus from spreading.

A Palestinian health official briefed on the situation in the West Bank and Gaza and how the donors cutting budgetary support to the PA will affect the health situation drastically, not only due to immediate concerns for transmission of the virus, but because poultry raising is a main source of income and of protein in Gaza diets, so the culling of poultry could lead to malnutrition. The health official explained that this is a regional humanitarian issue and needs to be dealt with regionally.

An Israeli ministry of health official briefed on the avian flu situation in Israel. Issues of concern include when farmers from affected areas can start raising poultry again and whether Tamiflu should be given to workers culling birds that are not sick. He suggested that the three countries strengthen their cooperation by formalizing communications links, conducting a free exchange of information, and coordinating their policies on key issues, and recommended writing a regional plan as soon as possible.

A Jordanian health official briefed on the situation in Jordan, which included one poultry outbreak and one human case. The official described measures that are being used to prevent the spread of the virus and the information provided to farmers as well as to the population in general about how to deal with it. The official addressed the gaps within the Jordanian system and said that priority needs include lab kits to deal with the increasing volume of suspected cases, improved communication, and training for those involved in the culling process.

At the end of the meeting the Palestinian, Israeli, and Jordanian health officials along with the international representatives agreed that the three nations need to write and implement a regional avian and pandemic influenza preparedness plan and to demonstrate their support for filling the financial and material gaps in Palestine and elsewhere.

They agreed to take this recommendation to their ministries so they can draft a plan within the coming two weeks. Search for Common Ground agreed to facilitate the process of writing the regional plan, and will convene a drafting workshop for the three ministries in Jerusalem in two weeks' time.

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