Risk Communications Exercise on (A)H7N9

EXERCISE

Disclaimer
This is a fictional scenario intended to serve as the basis for training discussions. The contents of this scenario do not represent the views of any organizations or WHO.

BACKGROUND

Event Information
In MONTH YEAR, DAY ONE, human cases of H7N9 continues to be reported in Zambre, and some rumours of cases have also been noted in its neighbor countries. Investigations are still on-going.

Much still remains unknown about the virus including the animal reservoirs in which it is circulating, the main exposures and the routes of transmission and the scope of spread of this virus among people and animals. Zambre has tested approximately 500,000 samples nationwide since the beginning of the outbreak in March 2013. Only 50 samples have tested positive for H7N9.

Teobaria is on high alert and MOH issued directives to strengthen surveillance, communication and preparedness across the country in the event that H7N9 is discovered in Teobaria. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have been conducting H7N9 surveillance in live bird markets in Teobaria. Media coverage about H7N9 has also intensified.

SCENARIO

DAY 1

Paper Inject
Mr Po (index case), a 44-year-old male poultry trader living in Bori, Kam Cha Province develops sore throat, cough and fever (>38°C). His symptoms appeared on DAY 0 – 3.

The patient sells illegally traded chickens at Saleu Market, the biggest market in Kam Cha Province area which is (40km) kilometres away from Kam Cha town. He is married with two children aged 20 (male) and 15 (female). His mother also lives with his family.

Mr Pon sought treatment at the district hospital on DAY 1 but was transferred to Kam Cha provincial hospital (30 km away) when he began to have difficulty breathing and his overall condition deteriorated rapidly. As the clinician suspected H5N1 because of the patient’s job, samples were taken and sent to National Institute of Public Health Laboratory. As H5N1 was suspected, the patient was treated directly by antivirals.

An internal email from the of the head of the NIPH laboratory is sent to Dr. Mar Nan informing him of the influenza A H7N9 diagnosis and sent for confirmation at Institut Pasteur du Teobri (IPT).
DAY 2

Paper Inject

The head of the NIPH Laboratory reports that Case 1 is RT-PCR positive for H7N9 via email to Dr Mar Nan in the afternoon of Day 2. The IPT confirms the test results.

Mr Pon (Case 1) dies early evening of Day 2 from severe pneumonia before investigation team is able to talk to the case.

EXPECTED ACTIONS

Dr Mar Nan is expected to forward the information to relevant directors and officers in charge of communication in the Ministry of Health, including the Risk Communications Unit.

CDC is expected to hold a meeting to launch risk assessment and decision at different levels for actions and response.

The internal communication and discussions must be logged. Key players to conduct risk assessment as well as identify risk communication needs. The IHR notification needs to be drafted.

DAY 3

Media Inject

Man Nha Post: **Confirmed! Deadly bird flu in Teobaria**

DAY 3--A man has tested positive for H7N9 in Kam Cha Province says a source from NIPH. (Mr Pon, a 44 year old poultry trader developed sore throat, cough and fever and was transferred to the Kampong Chnang Provincial hospital after his condition worsened rapidly on DAY 1.

The doctor at the Kam Cha Provincial Hospital said, “Because of the patient’s job and the precedent cases of H5N1 in the country, we first suspected H5N1. After the confirmation from the laboratory, it doesn’t surprise me that we have our first case of H7N9, especially because of all the trading of poultry and porous borders between our countries”

Samples from the patient tested positive for H7N9 at the NIPH in Man Nha.

Mr Pon bought and sold imported poultry at the Saleu Market, the biggest market near Kam Cha Province area, which is 40km kilometers away from the Kam Cha town. A local villager who had close contact with the patient said "We are very concerned about this illness. We’ve heard that it is a Chinese disease and we knew it was only a matter of time before Teobaria will be affected by this new deadly bird flu. We are all terrified but feel powerless against this threat."
Paper Inject
An internal briefing note is sent by Dr. Mar Nan, Director of the Disease Control Division of MOH to all participants with the following background information:

- Rapid animal health and human health response teams are deployed to Kam Cha Province to begin investigation, including contact tracing and collecting specimens.
- The CDC Surveillance and Response Team was convened. The entire Cabinet members have been alerted and a meeting was also held.
- The rapid response team from the Provincial Health Department is deployed to the village. The Provincial Health Department reports information to CDC.
- The Rapid Response Team (RRT) collects specimens from the contacts and sends to NIPH.
- IPT suggested to CDC Department to collect specimens from the man’s wife, children and mother as well as any friends and visitors who came by the house in the last two weeks.
- The Ministry of Agriculture is informed and notifies provincial units to intensify surveillance of live bird markets.

Media Inject
International news agency Associated Press picks up news story.

Associated Press: Teobaria sees first death from new bird flu

DAY 3 – A Teobarian poultry trader has died of H7N9 in in Kam Cha Province according to an unnamed Ministry of Health official here in Phnom Penh. He tested positive for the H7N9 virus, which has so far only been detected in Zambre, and suspected in other countries cross the region. The 44-year-old man developed sore throat cough and fever and was transferred to the Kam Cha Provincial Hospital after his condition worsened rapidly on DAY 1. He died of severe pneumonia late DAY 3.

This is first confirmed case of H7N9 in Teobaria amid growing fears that the disease would spread to the country ever since cases were identified in Zambre in 2013 and rumoured to have also infected neighbouring countries. Until now, much still remains unknown about this virus including the animal reservoir in which it is circulating, the main exposures and routes of transmission and the scope of spread of this virus among people and animals. At the moment, it is assumed that the H7N9 virus does not spread easily between people.

Although Teobaria does not share a contiguous border with Zambre, the two countries have a commercial relationship and illegal poultry trading happens between the two countries., illegal poultry trading happens neighboring countries, Locals here have long echoed their fears that the H7N9 virus would cross over into Teobaria via its neighbours because so few controls are in place to police the poultry trade.

“Everyone who buys chickens or ducks in Teobaria can assume they have been imported illegally from Astonia and/or Zambre,” said a local food stall owner Ms Chan. “I would prefer to buy Teobaria-bred poultry but I can never verify the true origins of my chicken.”

WHO Teobaria country office (ESR team leader Dr Reiko Tsuyuoka) sends email to Dr Mar Nan to report that WHO Teobaria is inundated with media queries and advises MOH to develop media statement, identify spokespersons and notify the case through the National Focal Point for the International Health Regulations (IHR) the first case of H7N9. WHO also offers technical support.
Media reporters cold call Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture officials asking for more information. Media queries from local paper Senzu Post, Teobaria Daily and international press agency Agence France Press were sent to MOH/CDC. International and national media try to contact WHO, MOH and the provincial health authorities to get as much information as possible.

**EXPECTED ACTIONS**

CDC ensures internal communication and sharing of information within CDC and MoH. MOH to draft first media statement, develop three key messages for talking points to ensure message consistency. Identify spokesperson from each ministry involved in the response. Develop preventive measures messages. Respond to media interviews and queries.

IHR notification is sent to WHO.

**DAY 4**

Dr. Paul Horwood, temporary head of virology, IPT, calls Dr Mar Nan to confirm Case 2 positive result for H7N9.

**Paper Inject**

An internal meeting will be hold by Dr. Mar Nan and then, summary note is sent by Dr. Mar Nan, Director of the Communicable Diseases Control Division of MOH to all participants with the following background information:

- A 56-year-old man named Mr. Samnang in Kam Cha Province seeks treatment at the Kampong Tralach hospital on Day 3 for severe acute respiratory infection and fever (>38ºC).
- Case 2 is a carpenter and lives in Kam Cha Province with his wife, son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren aged 4 and 10. As a side hobby he keeps fighting cocks as pets and regularly frequents the Tralach market to buy new fighting cocks.
- Throat swab culture sent to NIPT for testing late DAY 3 and positive result for H7N9 confirmed by IPT on DAY 4.
- Rapid response teams are deployed this afternoon to investigate and collect specimens from Case 2 and all contacts he had in the last two weeks

**Update on deceased Case 1:**

- The provincial medical staff met the family members of deceased case 1 in person. Initial lab results have been reported for five contacts of the H7N9 case: his wife, his two children and his mother. All five results were negative.
- The Provincial Health Department is collaboration with central level.
- The rapid response team from is deployed to the village. Reports have been prepared.
- The Ministry of Agriculture has been conducting intense H7N9 surveillance in poultry in live bird markets of Kam Cha Province, nearby provinces and even Senzu which are the main corridors for illegal poultry trade to Teobaria. Surveillance is conducted along highways which are a main transport hub that connects key border areas to other parts of Teobaria.

The Ministry of Agriculture phones Dr Mar Nan to inform him that three poultry specimens test positive for H7N9 in Kam Cha Province.
Dr Mar Nan sends an email to Dr Reiko Tsuyuoka and WHO Representative informing him that official notification through IHR has been made and requests WHO technical support for risk communications, outbreak response and international cooperation.

The Ministry of Agriculture sends an email to Ministry of Health to inform that 3 positive cases of H7N9 in poultry have been discovered, culled and that Ministry of Agriculture is shutting down the live bird markets for one day cleaning in Kam Cha Province.

**Media Inject**

*International and National headlines: Two cases of new Bird Flu in Teobaria, Chinese chickens to blame!*

DAY 4 – Two men have tested positive for H7N9 and one has died of the disease. Earlier today a Ministry of Health official stated that intense investigations into poultry have resulted in 3 positive cases of H7N9 in chickens. The Ministry of Agriculture has decided to shut down live bird markets for the one-day cleaning initiative. Sources say that the infected chickens, although asymptomatic, definitely originate from Zambre and illegally imported to Teobaria. Dr. Sovann said that the H7N9 virus identified in poultry samples earlier this week posed a serious threat to human health.

Local villagers are outraged that bird markets have been shut down for one day cleaning as poultry trade is an important source of economic revenue for people in Teobaria.

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Although Teobaria does not share a border with Zambre, the two countries have a commercial relationship and illegal poultry trading happens between the two countries. Locals here have long echoed their fears that the H7N9 virus would cross over into Teobaria via its neighbours because so few controls are in place to police the poultry trade.

“Everyone who buys chickens or ducks in Teobaria can assume they have been imported illegally from Zambre,” said a local food stall owner Ms Chan. “I would prefer to buy Teobaria-bred poultry but I can never verify the true origins of my chicken.”

**EXPECTED ACTIONS**

The information is expected to be communicated to relevant participants about Case 2. The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture to develop joint statement that includes all the latest information about all human and poultry cases, preventive measures for both human/animals as well as next steps. Support from WHO may be solicited. Talking points and preventive measures should be updated. Statement and talking points should be sent by email to WHO for review.
**Paper Inject**
French diplomatic mission sends an email to International Cooperation Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, copied to WHO, requesting more information about cases, preventive measures, risk assessment. The French diplomatic mission requests that more up to date information be available on line on MOH/MA and WHO websites.

**Media Inject**

**International and National headlines: Teobaria on the verge of H7N9 outbreak**

**DAY 5** – Two men have tested positive for H7N9 and one has died of the disease. Earlier today a Ministry of Agriculture (MA) official stated that intense investigations into poultry have resulted in 3 positive cases of H7N9 in chickens. Ministry of Agriculture has decided to shut down live bird market for one-day cleaning initiative in Kam Cha Province.

Sources say that the infected chickens, although asymptomatic definitely originate from Zambre. The MAFF Provincial official said that the H7N9 virus identified in poultry samples earlier this week posed a serious threat to human health.

Local villagers outraged that bird markets have been shut down as poultry trade is an important source of economic revenue for people in Teobaria.

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International news agencies continue to request interviews with a Ministry of Agriculture spokesman by email and phone. Spokesperson from each ministry to respond to media interviews over the phone. The Ministry of Health phone lines are overwhelmed with inquiries.

Media reporters continue to cold call and do on the spot interviews with MOH and MA participants.

**EXPECTED ACTIONS**
Risk Communication Unit to coordinate the communication response. The Health Minister sends update email as a response to the French Mission that includes talking points and preventive measures and acknowledgement of need to improve online communications. MOH /MA officials respond to media requests.
DAY 6

Media Inject
Astoria confirms cases of H7N9.

DAY 7

IPT virology head calls Dr Mar Nan to confirm Case3 and 4 positive results for H7N9.

Paper Inject
Case 3 and Case 4 report onset of symptoms on DAY 5 and DAY 6 respectively. Case 3 (75 yrs old) Sarat and Case 4 (70 yrs) Sarunare brothers living in Senzu in one house with their extended family. Both brothers raise backyard poultry which they buy at the market. Swab tests are sent to NIPH in late afternoon of DAY 6 and RT PCR positive results are confirmed DAY 7 by IPT.

The rapid response team from MoH is deployed to the field to collect specimens from the brother’s wife, children and mother as well as any friends and visitors who came by the house in the last two weeks. Ministry of Agriculture is informed and notifies provincial units to continue surveillance of live bird markets.
DAY 8

Media Inject

**International and National headlines: Two new cases of H7N9 in Teobaria suggest possible human-to-human transmission**

DAY 8 – Two brothers in their 70s are in Calmette Hospital suffering from severe respiratory symptoms. Both men have tested positive for H7N9 and one has died of the disease. Earlier today a Ministry of Agriculture official stated that intense investigations into poultry have resulted in 3 positive cases of H7N9 in chickens. Ministry of Agriculture has decided to shut down live bird market for one-day cleaning initiative in both Kam Cha Province and to enhance market surveillance in Phnom Penh.

Sources say that the infected chickens, although asymptomatic definitely originate from Zambre, and transported through neighbouring countries. The MAFF official said that the H7N9 virus identified in poultry samples earlier this week posed a serious threat to human health.

Local villagers outraged that bird markets have been shut down as poultry trade is an important source of economic revenue for people in Teobaria.

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The CDC website crashes from too much traffic. WHO Teobaria risk communication officer calls to Dr Mar Nan and the Risk Communications Unit Team Leader Dr Teng Srey requesting updated media statement and that MOH develop an H7N9 emergency website page that includes FAQs, hotline number, updated case numbers and preventive measures as well as links to relevant websites.

MOH Hotline Manager to notify that the hotline service is overwhelmed and cannot manage the influx of calls. Social media headlines blame government for lack of control of illegal poultry trade from the neighbouring countries for spread of disease in Teobaria.

Minister of Health calls Dr Mar Nan to say that high-level MOH staff are being inundated by calls from the local/international media as well as the international community. He complains that the media are spreading false rumors about an outbreak and that MOH and MA lower level staff are making public statements that are not consistent. Dr Mar Nan has a direct order from the Health Minister for an updated risk communication plan and procedures that must be reported back to him by end of day in order to better manage the communications for the H7N9 event.
EXPECTED ACTIONS

Participants to discuss and develop outline of risk communication plan and tools for the Minister. Media statement and key messages need to be revised to include latest information about case 3 and 4. FAQs must be developed based on information already available online.

An email to Health Minister outlining risk communication plan and tools must include:

- Press conference
- FAQs
- H7N9 emergency webpage activated
- Hotline service will be enhanced with more staff
- Social media will be closely monitored and rumors will be addressed
- Talking points will be regularly updated for senior managers
- Regular updates will be provided to media and public and international community
- Behavior change and preventive measure materials will be developed and disseminated

End of Exercise