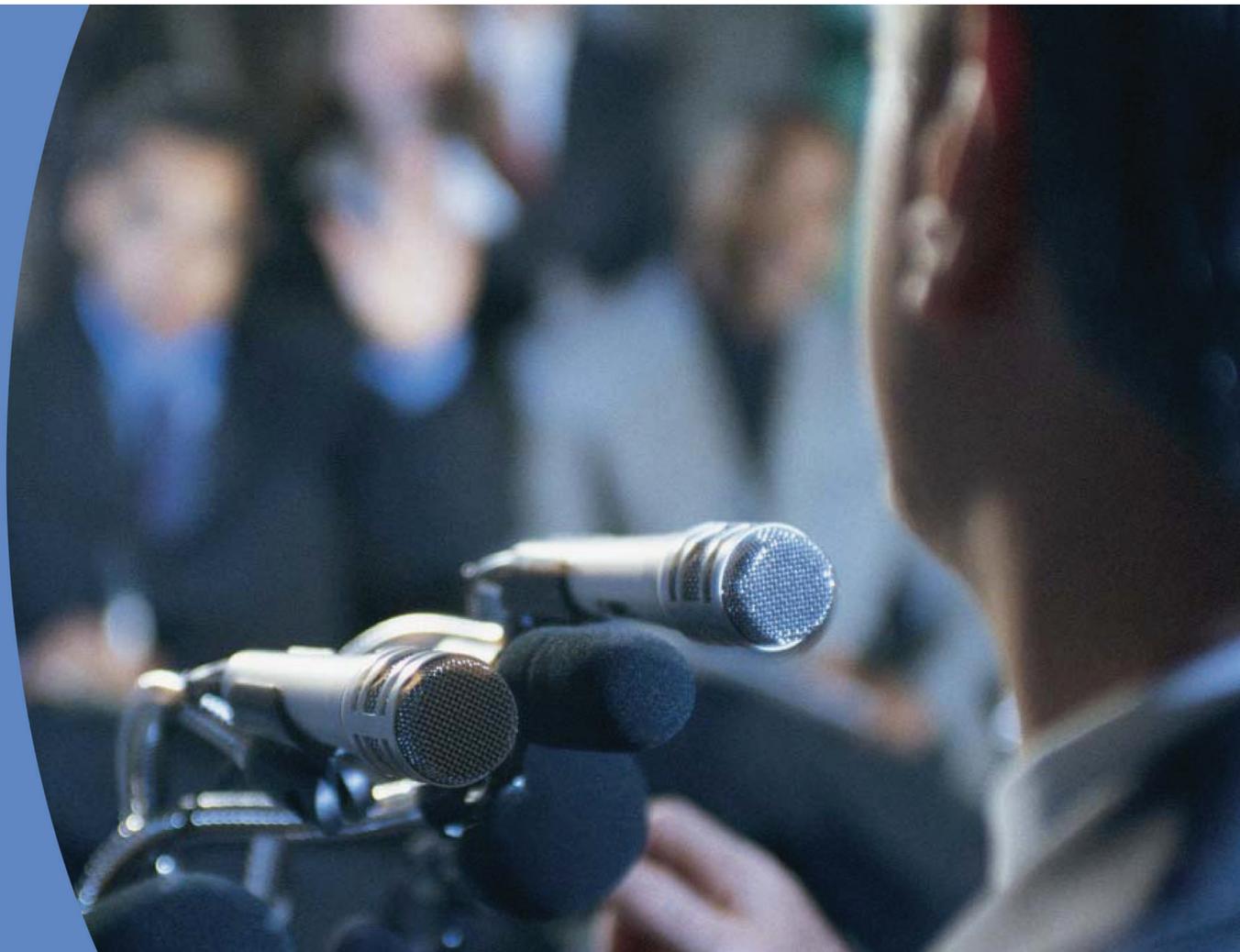




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A V I A N I N F L U E N Z A

***EMERGENCY RISK
COMMUNICATION***



Avian Influenza Emergency Risk Communication

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of emergency risk management and communication has been highlighted repeatedly over the past several years in a variety of public health emergencies. From the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in Asia and North America in 2003, to the release of anthrax in the U.S. in September 2001, to the tsunami in Southeast Asia in December 2004, history has shown that a lack of crisis planning can make managing stressful, chaotic situations even more difficult than it has to be. Indeed, because of the high levels of chaos and confusion that will often exist in an outbreak situation -- and the extreme level of pressure that can be placed on an individual and their ability to make rational, effective and timely decisions -- emergency risk management is usually based on a team approach to decision-making, response and control.

In this Guide, this team-based approach is applied to the scenario of an avian influenza outbreak, leading you through the steps necessary to first plan and develop a response and then to secondly, implement the plan. It will provide you with practical direction on how to effectively communicate correct information and what to do during the pre-outbreak, outbreak and post-outbreak periods. Many of these skills can also be applied to other crisis/emergency situations.

It is important to note that this Guide addresses only the communications aspect of a response to avian influenza, which is only one part of an overall risk management response. There are several checklists and resources, many of which are found in *Appendix G – List of Avian Influenza and Crisis Management Resources*, that can aid organizations with overall response strategies.

Whatever the situation, members of your response team must be honest, candid and flexible; they must combine a sense of urgency with sensitivity and a large measure of common sense. They must demonstrate to the public at large that your organization is caring, competent and responsible. Doing so will go a long way toward reassuring your various constituencies, conveying correct information and dissolving rumors and misinformation, maintaining credibility, and bringing the situation to resolution as thoroughly and efficiently as possible.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

This Guide is separated into two parts: Part 1 - Avian Influenza Emergency Risk Communication Planning and Part 2 - Taking Action and Communicating Effectively during an Avian Influenza Outbreak.

Part 1, Avian Influenza Emergency Risk Communication Planning, explains how to establish an Avian Influenza Communication Task Force, and discusses the roles and responsibilities of

each Task Force member and their importance to your organization during an outbreak. It also discusses what you should consider when anticipating an outbreak of avian influenza and the kinds of partners and alliances you should form to prevent and control further outbreaks.

Part 2, *Taking Action and Communicating Effectively during an Outbreak*, provides practical examples and lessons for communicators from the field of risk management science. At the conclusion of Part 2, we anticipate that you will be familiar with the steps and actions necessary to communicate effectively with the media and your community using methods developed over years of experience.

This Guide is designed to be used in the active development of procedures and protocols for using communication in responding to an outbreak of avian influenza. It is not a textbook to be read, but a series of exercises and checklists that can guide you in your approach. Because each situation is unique, your approach will need to be adapted to suit your particular organization and outbreak situation. Moreover, the Communication Plan that you develop will be a living document and must be constantly referred to and refreshed as your control and containment strategy evolves, and more importantly, as the situation changes.

Although not required, it is suggested that you and your team work with a trained Avian Influenza Emergency Risk Communication facilitator, who is trained in planning and communications. A facilitator will greatly increase the efficiency with which you work through this Guide as you develop your plan and communication skills.

PART I

AVIAN INFLUENZA EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION PLANNING

Before an outbreak even occurs, there are certain preparations that can be undertaken to ensure that things go smoothly if avian influenza is detected in your region. These generally fall in the following categories:

- Forming an Avian Influenza Communication Task Force
- Gathering Information Resources
- Identifying Partners and Alliances
- Working with the Community

FORMING AN AVIAN INFLUENZA COMMUNICATION TASK FORCE

Avian influenza requires a complex government response at the central (national), regional (provincial/state) and local (district, city) levels. Each governmental agency needs to communicate effectively with each other, their stakeholders, the media, and the general public. Planning in advance is the best way to mitigate problems during the response and recovery phase.

As part of convening an Avian Influenza Communication Task Force, it is important to determine whether your country or locality has an existing Avian Influenza Preparedness Work Group or Communications Subcommittee. If these bodies exist, your Communication Task Force will likely be working closely with them in devising your organization's communications strategy and activities.

It is also important to ensure that your Avian Influenza Communication Task Force fits into the overarching national plan on AI (if one exists). Many governments have already created a National AI Plan that details a specific chain of command to approve and authorize decisions and action. The National Plan can originate in the President's office, or in the governor or

mayor's office. Another issue to research is whether your country or region has developed a national approach to animal disease emergency preparedness. This type of plan is useful, particularly because it can serve as a reference book for national veterinary services, as well as provide guidance on international collaboration.⁴

Representatives who hold authority within their respective agencies must be part of the larger outbreak command team. Your organization's communications task force should ideally include representatives from each of the participating agencies -- including officials in agriculture, health, and the office of the president – or individuals who will be responsible for accessing these representatives.

Task force members should hold sufficient security clearance to ensure that they have access to the most accurate and current information. To minimize confusion during the crisis, it is best to identify the agencies that are responsible for reporting particular statistics that you will need, and ensure there is agreement to share these figures with the Avian Influenza Communication Task Force in advance. For example, determine which department is responsible for calculating and compiling death rates for animals and/or humans during an infectious disease outbreak, and ensure that you have a contact through which to obtain this type of information.

Following is an ideal list of members of an Avian Influenza Communication Task Force, and their suggested roles. Depending on your particular situation, you may want to add other roles, or support staff for each of these leaders/officers.

⁴ The UN FAO developed a Manual on the Preparation of National Animal Disease Emergency Preparedness Plans, FAO Animal Health Manual No. 6, 1999.

Table of Roles and Responsibilities for an Avian Influenza Communication Task Force

Title	Role
Overall Communication Leader	Coordinates overall operations, determines how communication fits in national plan on AI (if applicable); Is also a member of the larger AI Response Team.
Primary Spokesperson	Leader, recognized authority in animal or human health; resonates with the populations and has credibility and support of authorities.
Secondary Spokesperson	A “backup.” Able to stand in when primary spokesperson is otherwise occupied, communicates with key stakeholders (political groups, business, NGO).
Communication Officer	Manages information and media relations, serves as point person for the media and coordinates spokesperson’s schedule and access to the media and other stakeholders; writer, strategist, and gives final release of all print and broadcast materials issued by the Task Force. Obtains final sign-off on schedules, press materials, and information distribution.
Animal Health Officer	Subject specific expert on H5N1 in the animal environment; candidate could be the Chief Veterinary Officer or Director of Veterinary Services or a private veterinarian from academia or civil society.
Public Health / Medical Advisor	Subject specific expert on H5N1 in human health context.
Information Logistics Officer	Manages how the command team gets information and transmits information internally, to field and between agencies, manages communication technology for command center facility. Determines which agency or organization will release specific information or take the lead on handling a situation.
Legal Counsel	Able to interpret constitutional law and advise on legal implications of containment actions and other decisions

Issues that should be clarified among all of these AI Communication Task Force members include:

- Lines of authority for making decisions about :
 - Actions
 - Emergency regulations
 - Financial obligations
 - Communications to the public
- Which individual makes the final decisions (has “sign-off”) for the above matters. This does not mean he/she will be an authority on all of these, but rather that he/she will receive expert input and information in order to make an informed and responsible decision. If that person is not available, the Task Force must agree on how and to whom that decision-making authority is delegated.
- Location

The Avian Influenza Communication Task Force ideally should be located wherever the central “command center” is located, such as the capital city. This ensures centrality and reduces duplication of resources and information. Oftentimes there are two centers of information – one at the central command and another at the site of the outbreak. Make sure that media are aware that they can obtain accurate and up-to-the-minute information at either of these locations, and assign a contact person at each. This makes it easier for them to report the story, and discourages them from seeking non-official sources of information. If possible, facilities should be provided to the media that include waiting rooms with telephones and Internet capability, desks and restrooms. Also plan for how to disseminate information in the event that there is an electrical or technology failure that would impair internet access or mobile phones.

As noted in the preceding table, a key individual to identify at the beginning will be your organization’s spokesperson. In addition, you should appoint a separate contact person who will handle all inquiries to (and appearances by) the program spokesperson(s). The contact person will be responsible for coordinating media inquiries, and ensuring that questions are answered by the most qualified individuals. The Communication Officer will serve as the official contact person. He/she can delegate the actual task to a second (or deputy) communication officer. Both of these people must be trained to talk to and work with the media.

The primary spokesperson should be at a senior level and ideally should not have to focus on other duties during the outbreak. Individuals who are selected to serve as spokespersons should receive training in communication and public health issues. Be sure to have a range of other experts you can call upon to handle specific subjects, such as animal and human health officials. Staff should be reminded that all inquiries from media or other agencies should be

forwarded to the contact person/Communication Officer.

The World Health Organization’s Field Guide for “Effective Media Communication during Public Health Emergencies” provides an Assessment Tool for gauging internal media relations capabilities. A copy of this Tool is provided in *Appendix A*. After the Task Force members are assigned and understand their roles and responsibilities; it is helpful to have a mock outbreak scenario before an actual “crisis” occurs so that each member is oriented to their role and can anticipate potential problems and obstacles.

GATHERING INFORMATION RESOURCES

There are many sources of information that your organization can consult to obtain up-to-date information on developments on outbreaks of avian influenza. These include USAID, CDC, WHO, FAO, PAHO, USDA, OIE and many other international agencies and NGOs. Perhaps even more important is obtaining information on your local government’s policies on a potential outbreak. For example, many national governments have developed a national avian influenza plan, which outlines, among other issues, whether they would consider widespread poultry vaccination or culling flocks that are suspected to be infected (and if so, what the process would be for deciding how and where to accomplish this, how farmers would be compensated and how much). National plans also provide contact information for technical experts on animal or human health, epidemiology and surveillance, emergency response, and media relations. Even if your country’s national plan has not been implemented, the plan document itself will still be helpful as a resource.

Communication materials have already been developed – in a variety of languages and formats -- by U.S. Government agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Materials also have been created by the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). Most of this information can be used or adapted for use by your organization. These materials include:

- Messages or talking points addressing prevention and control of avian influenza for animals and humans
- Frequently Asked Questions and Fact Sheets about avian influenza
- Posters
- Radio public service announcements
- Television public service announcements
- Live-read scripts that can be used for radio, television or loudspeaker
- Leaflets and job aids for health care providers, community workers, veterinary workers, teachers and others
- Brochures/booklets for farmers, veterinary workers, and members of the general population

- Informational websites, CDs, audiotapes and videotapes
- Informational presentations for community organizations and unions, religious organizations and other local groups
- Training curricula for agriculture workers, veterinary workers, and others
- Extension programs for farmers and agriculture workers

Other resources include guides on effective media communication during public health emergencies, media training curricula, health care and laboratory worker curricula on emerging infectious diseases, and workplace preparedness guides. A listing of helpful resources related to avian and pandemic influenza, as well as risk and crisis communication, is provided in *Appendix G – List of Avian Influenza and Crisis Management Resources*.

IDENTIFYING PARTNERS AND ALLIANCES

Anticipating what organizations and individuals you will need to properly manage the outbreak and fostering those alliances early on will save you valuable time searching for the right people in the heat of the crisis. Forming a coalition of influential stakeholders will help both in planning and preparation for outbreaks, but also in implementing activities and disseminating messages during the actual emergency. It is recommended that each person on your Communication Task Force be given responsibility for serving as a liaison between the task force and the various partner organizations, officials and experts. There should also be an alliance or coalition liaison or coordinator.

Government Partners

The local, regional or national government is an obvious starting point for establishing contact. Because avian influenza affects animals directly, the Ministry or Department of Agriculture will be an important coordinating agency, as will the department of wildlife or animal health, if one exists. Because the threat of transmission from animals to humans also exists, the Ministry of Health must also actively participate. The Ministry of Information/Culture would be another logical addition to the team, as would the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance/Trade/Commerce. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is important because avian influenza is a disease that transcends national boundaries and has the potential to affect geographic neighbors. Ensuring cooperation and information exchange between neighboring countries will increase the likelihood of success of any avian influenza control activities. Moreover, because of the increasing amount of cross-border media, the populations in neighboring nations may have similar concerns and desire for answers.

Participation by the Ministry of Finance/Trade/Commerce is essential because the economic cost of an outbreak is high if commercial poultry farms and even backyard farmers must cull their flocks to control transmission. In fact, a timely and organized compensation plan for farmers of culled flocks often determines the level of local cooperation and support

in reporting sick birds. Community reporting will increase if people feel that they will be compensated in some way if their flocks are culled. Other financial considerations would arise from a containment strategy that necessitates the partial closure of wet markets and some transportation systems such as roads or airports. If a national disaster management authority exists, representation from that agency should also be consulted.

Ideally, the office of the mayor, governor (or other internal government office) should be included – as should the office of the President or Prime Minister. Having support from these groups and individuals will facilitate planning and implementation of any plan.

Donor Organizations

In the event that an H5N1 outbreak occurs and clusters of humans begin to get sick from human-to-human transmission, the likely recommended containment plan is to reduce further exposure to the virus. All these potential factors require a thorough assessment of the legal environment to determine what statutes, laws, or powers must be invoked to coordinate and facilitate a timely and legal response. In some cases, this command team might include country representatives of international organizations who are global stakeholders in the control of avian influenza (i.e., USAID, FAO, OIE, WHO).

International Nongovernmental Organizations

Many of the international relief agencies and development agencies will want to offer support during this crisis. These organizations can be extremely helpful and often have the resources at the local level that can facilitate message and materials distribution. Building alliances with these partners early on and assigning clearly defined responsibilities and jurisdictions will greatly add to an organized and efficient response.

Private/Civil Society/Religious Groups

Alliances should also be considered with local NGOs, community groups and unions, labor groups, political organizations and schools/universities that can help to disseminate messages, as well as actively participate in control activities. For example, basic information on good hygiene practices promoted in schools could go a long way in helping to control the spread of avian influenza. In more remote areas, local NGOs and other community groups may be the best way to gain access to (and the confidence of) a population that has little contact with – or trust in -- outside government officials.

Depending upon the situation at hand, other partners to be considered include law enforcement, fire departments, hospitals, emergency medical services, professional crisis management organizations, public works departments, and military and intelligence agencies. In particular, military operations might be useful for transportation if outbreak areas are inaccessible to “normal” civilian vehicles, or if there are ongoing security issues (as in the case of civil unrest). Police can also assist with security, as well as with enforcement of

quarantine and poultry movement, particularly in places where there is a problem with smuggling of livestock. It might be useful to consult with police representatives as part of your communication approach, as they can serve as conduits for dissemination of disease control messages. In the case of the closure of wet markets or cock fighting arenas, for example, they will likely be called upon to help enforce these actions and will have interpersonal communication opportunities with people who are seeking information. Educating police and other civil servants on basic avian influenza prevention and control activities (e.g., hygiene, personal protective equipment) would thus be useful to them and to the population they serve.

Finally, in many cultures and regions, religious groups play a large role not only in disseminating information, but also in helping to convince people to undertake preventive or other measures. It is thus imperative to reach out to churches, temples, and other religious or para-religious organizations to gain their input and buy-in.

Business and Media

Private sector organizations and business could lend a hand in providing resources, equipment, or relevant expertise. For example, corporate donations of personal protective equipment (gloves, masks, boots); cleaning supplies (soap, disinfectants, antiseptics); or medical equipment would be useful in the case of an avian influenza outbreak. In areas where there are no departments of public works, private sector organizations might be called upon to assist with earth-moving or disinfectant-spraying equipment, and expertise in the disposal of slaughtered poultry in eradication campaigns. In addition, private companies and businesses have much to lose and will be a critical link to communicate correct information to their employees.

Forging a partnership with media organizations and journalists early on will help to make communications run smoothly if an outbreak occurs. It is recommended that you begin compiling a list of possible media contacts in advance so that you can get your messages and information out as quickly as possible. *(Please refer to the section “Working with the Media” for more suggestions on this.)*

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Avian influenza kills mostly poultry but it has devastating financial effects on the communities affected by an outbreak. By not controlling the virus when it first appears, you run the risk of H5N1 becoming endemic within your animal population. As seen in other countries, this greatly increases the odds that humans will eventually become infected, many of whom will die, while even more families lose their economic livelihoods and sources of nutrition. Consequentially, we have learned from countries where compensation for culled flocks was slow or otherwise not forthcoming, that the community resisted reporting of sick birds and often sold-off or consumed birds suspected of having avian influenza. Because disease

surveillance relies on timely and honest reporting, a community that fears for its economic well-being will resist efforts to detect new cases. Your communications should work to quell this concern.

Thus, your greatest asset in control and surveillance program for avian influenza is the local community. Engaging them early on and informing them of your plans and especially what they can expect to have happen, will serve you well in terms of getting local support and compliance if an outbreak occurs.

The following sample questions will likely be asked by community members and should be anticipated by you.

- What is H5N1 or bird flu?
- Am I or is my family at risk?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- What can I do to protect my animals?
- What do I do if I think my birds or other flocks are sick?
- What will happen to me if I report the sickness?
- Will I or my family be in trouble?
- What should I do?
- Will I be compensated if my animals are culled?
- Can you stop it from spreading?
- Who is in charge, at the local and central level?
- Has this outbreak been contained?
- What can we expect, right now and later?
- Are there any human victims?
- Who is responsible for this?
- How will you know if more outbreaks occur?

Formulating answers to these questions, or at least determining where you can obtain information to enable the answering of these questions – will help you provide comprehensive and presumably more publicly satisfying responses.

You will need to tailor your messages and the media channels through which they are disseminated based on the audience. In the case of avian influenza, the community members with the most at stake will likely be small farmers or families that own poultry. While personal visits and discussions with farming communities and livestock traders are preferred, radio and television messages can usually reach this audience as well. Radio and TV messages should perhaps be broadcast at times of the day when most farmers are likely to be listening to the radio (or watching television), such as early in the morning or when news or weather reports are being aired.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

The more you prepare in advance to work with the media, the better your results will be. We strongly urge you to build relationships early on with reporters and editors so that when an outbreak occurs, they know to come to you first.

Part of this preparatory work includes assessing the needs of the various types of media (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) and their constraints. The most effective media outlets to reach your particular target audiences should be identified.

Some media constraints might be a lack of resources or expertise in the area of infectious disease, stringent deadlines, or overly-rigid oversight from government agencies that might limit their ability to report on a story the way they would like. Examples of media needs are elaborated upon in “What the Media Wants” on page ???. Media needs can also be ascertained by delving into an established list of common questions asked by the media in the case of an outbreak (see *Appendix B for the List of 77 Most Common Questions Asked by the Media, a resource provided as part of the WHO Field Guide for “Effective Media Communication during Public Health Emergencies”*). Reviewing these questions in advance and thinking through some potential responses will help to formulate messages, as well as make interviews and other speaking engagements run more smoothly.

It should be noted that tapping into the mass news media (newspapers and radio and television stations) should only be one part of a larger communication strategy during an outbreak of avian influenza. Other media outlets that can be tapped into include newsletters, bulletin boards, web sites, and traditional and folk media (such as storytelling).

