



IMCAPI

19 - 21 April, Hanoi, Vietnam

2010 INTERNATIONAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON ANIMAL AND PANDEMIC INFLUENZA The Way Forward

Press Release

Ministerial conference in Hanoi, 19-21 April, to strengthen global defences against new diseases

(BANGKOK, 1 April) A ministerial conference to marshal international cooperation against the advance of new infectious diseases opens this month in Hanoi, drawing on experience gained in responses to pandemic A/H1N1 influenza and H5N1 avian influenza.

Vietnam, with a strong record in contending with both A/H1N1 and H5N1, will host the 19-21 April conference. Officials from health and agricultural ministries of nations throughout the world will be joined by United Nations, international agencies and representatives from the development community.

Last year's outbreak of a novel A/H1N1 virus was only one in a long series of infectious diseases that have made their way from the animal kingdom to the human.

The 2010 International Ministerial Conference on Animal and Pandemic Influenza, according to Vietnamese Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr. Cao Duc Phat, will be "an important event that will allow us to consolidate the lessons learnt from our efforts to control H5N1 and respond to H1N1... It will also provide commitment and direction on tackling emerging disease threats both now and into the future."

The forward movement of globalization is likely to accelerate the speed at which new infectious diseases are transmitted, as was evident in the rapid global spread of H1N1 in mid-2009. The opening up of isolated habitats to human development and the disruptive effects of climate change on eco-systems will probably increase the ability of diseases to make the jump from animal hosts to humans.

Organizers are counting on the ministerial conference to come up with enhanced cooperative measures for continuing to: push back the extent of H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza; improve systems to detect, assess and respond to existing and potential influenza pandemics; and address the root causes of disease emergence at the animal-human-ecosystem interface.

Experience in curtailing the spread of H5N1, which devastated bird flocks and poultry on three continents, as well as causing hundreds of human fatalities, has validated the 'one health' approach, involving humans, animals and natural environments. Improvements at the grassroots level in healthy poultry-raising techniques are proving their worth, and will need to be extended as increasing worldwide demand for food places a premium on primary sources of protein such as chicken.

BIRD FLU STILL A THREAT

The H5N1 virus nevertheless remains present in many locales and is endemic in five countries. The possibility remains that this highly pathogenic virus, with high fatality rates among both infected birds and infected humans, could undergo a mutation that will make it rapidly transmissible among people.



Government of Vietnam Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Health, US Agency for International Development, European Commission, United Nations, Asian Development Bank, World Bank

According to the senior UN System Influenza Coordinator, Dr. David Nabarro, the arrival of the H1N1 pandemic should not detract from sustaining efforts to stop the spread of H5N1, which remains a threat to animal and human health and to achievement of the Millennium Development Goal target of curtailing world hunger.

In terms of A/H1N1, international health regulations adopted in 2005 and public health measures put in place since then against the threat of a rapidly transmissible H5N1 mutation proved efficacious in the response to the 2009 pandemic. Also helping was the relatively mild virulence of A/H1N1, in comparison, for example, with the high fatality rate of avian influenza.

But the A/H1N1 pandemic nevertheless has killed over 16,000 people, poses a serious threat to pregnant women and young people, and has placed severe strains on health systems in even economically advanced nations. Furthermore, the severity of the pandemic remains to be tested in West Africa, now facing A/H1N1 for the first time during its peak influenza season.

The 2010 International Ministerial Conference on Animal and Pandemic Influenza (IMCAPI) is the seventh in a series of international ministerial conferences on animal and human influenza since 2005, and the first to take place since the 2009 pandemic.

IMCAPI Hanoi 2010 is being organized by the Government of Vietnam in coordination with the United States of America and the European Union. Support is coming from key international agencies in animal and human health: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB), together with the Office of the UN System Influenza Coordinator (UNSIC).

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Please also see the official IMCAPI website at www.imcapi-hanoi-2010.org and the UN System Influenza web portal, www.un-influenza.org.

