



Government of Japan



JAPAN-WHO JOINT MEETING ON EARLY RESPONSE TO POTENTIAL INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

**Tokyo, Japan
12-13 January 2006**

SUMMARY

With the world facing a continuously growing pandemic threat from avian influenza A(H5N1), an important and timely meeting which focused on early response to a potential influenza pandemic was jointly convened by the Government of Japan and the World Health Organization (WHO) in Tokyo, Japan from 12 to 13 January 2006.

In the early stages of the emergence of a potential pandemic, it may be possible in some situations to avert further virus spread by responding rapidly and if appropriate, implementing containment measures, including large-scale administration of antiviral drugs to the population in the affected area(s) together with additional complementary public health measures. If such rapid interventions are successful, hundreds of millions of cases of serious illness, millions of deaths, and adverse social and economic consequences expected to result from a future pandemic might be prevented.

However, attempting rapid containment is realistic only if the earliest signals of a potential influenza pandemic are detected and reported swiftly and comprehensive measures are fully implemented within a very short period. The window of opportunity for action is narrow.

Implementation of containment will require the rapid availability of antiviral drugs and additional supplies and equipment. The Government of Japan has committed to assist in the stockpiling of 500 000 courses of antiviral drugs, and to provide other equipments, which are to be used for rapid response and early containment activities in Asia.

This important meeting focused on identifying key issues and recommending priority actions necessary to develop a rapid response and containment capacity in Asia. The meeting discussed and provided recommendations on:

- (1) early response measures that should be implemented, if and when a potential human pandemic strain emerges;
- (2) regional and international coordination in several areas, including early detection and reporting of events with pandemic potential, stockpiling of antiviral drugs and other supplies, and operational support; and
- (3) early response measures at the country level, particularly those related to early detection and reporting, and the implementation of containment measures.

More than 130 participants, representatives and experts attended the meeting from 14 Asian countries (including all those affected by the H5N1 virus), donor countries and agencies, and regional and international organizations. Some countries were represented at ministerial level.

Although containment of a potential influenza pandemic has never been attempted and could either succeed or fail, the participants called for urgently developing the national, regional and international capacities and effective mechanisms necessary for early response and rapid containment. Several unusually complex issues and their possible solutions on such early interventions in Asia were identified and examined.

The main conclusions from this meeting are as follows:

- (1) The avian influenza A(H5N1) virus has become entrenched in many parts of Asia, and has also spread to other regions. This virus has caused more than 140 human infections, mainly in Asia, but more recently in Turkey. The H5N1 virus is an increasing threat to cause a pandemic and poses a serious global public health threat.
- (2) An influenza pandemic has the potential to cause a health, social and economic catastrophe for the region and the world. Therefore, it is imperative for all countries in Asia and the international community to affirm their shared responsibilities and make every possible effort to prevent a pandemic.
- (3) Mounting a rapid response to contain the earliest emergence of pandemic influenza is critical. This requires that any events with potential pandemic are detected and assessed rapidly, and that appropriate decisions and actions are implemented in a timely manner.
- (4) Immediate action areas for reducing the threat of an influenza pandemic include:
 - early detection and rapid reporting of any signals of a potential pandemic influenza among humans;
 - developing and implementing a rapid response and pandemic response containment strategy which should be integrated into national, regional and international influenza preparedness plans; and
 - establishing coordinated national, regional and international response mechanisms for facilitating such rapid response.
- (5) Top priorities for developing the rapid response and containment capability are to strengthen the national, regional and international capacities, particularly in the areas of surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, risk assessment and risk communication and for countries to implement the new International Health Regulations as soon as possible.
- (6) Developing the capability to respond rapidly and contain a pandemic in its earliest stages will strengthen the basic local, national and international capacities to respond to other public health emergencies of international concern.

Given that a future human influenza pandemic may pose serious public health threats to all countries and cause severe social and economic disruption in the globalized world, the participants agreed that any possible public health interventions with potential benefits to prevent a pandemic or delay its spread should be considered. Based on the major issues and challenges identified during the meeting, the participants recommended the following priority actions for countries, WHO and other partners:

Recommendations to countries

- (1) Countries should strengthen national and local capacities to detect and respond to early signals of a potential pandemic and any other public health events. Areas that should be strengthened include:
 - (a) disease, virus and other surveillance measures, such as rumour surveillance; and
 - (b) increasing community awareness and educating health workers to facilitate early detection and reporting.
- (2) Countries are strongly encouraged to comply as soon as possible with the provisions of the International Health Regulations (2005) that facilitate early recognition and reporting of events or warning signals of public health emergencies of international concern, such as a potential influenza pandemic.
- (3) Countries should notify WHO immediately if early signals of a potential pandemic are detected. Urgent risk assessments of these signals should be conducted in collaboration with WHO.
- (4) Countries should share specimens and virus isolates obtained from persons thought to be infected with a novel influenza virus such as H5N1. These specimens and isolates should be shared with the WHO Reference Laboratory Network in a timely manner. The results of the tests should be reported by the reference laboratories to the originating country and simultaneously to WHO as rapidly as possible.
- (5) Countries, with the assistance of WHO, should review and test the relevant protocols and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to identify important gaps and to allow necessary modifications to be made, including those reflecting unique or important considerations related to individual countries.
- (6) Countries should identify and address all practical issues including legal, logistical and operational issues, which must be addressed to allow full implementation of rapid containment.
- (7) Countries should integrate rapid response and containment concepts, strategies and implementation steps into national pandemic influenza preparedness plans.
- (8) Countries should promote and facilitate collection of the scientific evidence needed to further develop an evidence-based strategy for rapid containment measures.
- (9) Countries should establish intersectoral coordination mechanisms for national, regional and international partners.

Recommendations to WHO

- (1) WHO should urgently help countries to develop and strengthen national capacities to detect early signals of a potential pandemic.
- (2) WHO and its partners should urgently help countries develop or strengthen their local and national laboratory facilities so that early signals of a potential pandemic can be rapidly confirmed. WHO should also continue to strengthen regional and global laboratory networks.
- (3) WHO should immediately establish a full-time working group to further develop rapid response and containment strategies and to develop a concrete action plan that proposes protocols, timeframe, coordination and participation of partners, and other critical elements.
- (4) WHO and its partners should urgently draft a feasible overall strategy and related protocols and SOPs to allow and facilitate a rapid, coordinated and effective response to early signals of a potential pandemic.
- (5) WHO, with the assistance of its partners, should develop training modules and programmes to educate and train local and international staff about important concepts, strategies and procedures related to early detection, rapid response and containment.
- (6) WHO should, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other partners, coordinate the development of an appropriate risk communication strategy (including outbreak communication and communication for behavioural change). Appropriate messages should be formulated and provided to the general public and key groups about rapid response and containment, pandemic influenza, and other related and important topics. These messages must be accurate and should enhance effective social mobilization necessary to implement important public health interventions.
- (7) WHO should establish a decision-making process as part of a rapid response and containment process, which includes the establishment and utilization of an external advisory Influenza Pandemic Task Force. The Task Force will consist of public health and influenza experts and its purpose will be to provide an independent assessment of critical events related to pandemic influenza and recommendations to WHO about responding to the pandemic threat. The Task Force will have a specific advisory role when assessing potential early signals of pandemic influenza.
- (8) WHO should use its Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) and other necessary means to identify and mobilize the local, international staff and experts necessary to facilitate and implement rapid response and containment operations. Furthermore, WHO should provide training for these staff to make them as effective as possible in rapid response and containment operations.

Recommendations to other partners

- (1) International partners in collaboration with WHO should urgently help countries to develop and strengthen national capacities to detect early signals of a potential pandemic.
- (2) International partners (such as UNICEF) should help develop communication strategies and appropriate materials in collaboration with WHO and countries.
- (3) Japan and ASEAN countries, in collaboration with WHO, are asked to develop a detailed operational plan on stockpiles, including antiviral drugs, and share the information on the operational plan with other Asian countries.
- (4) All partners creating multinational stockpiles for rapid response should coordinate the supply contents and their release and use for rapid containment, and potentially other uses.