

Current Health Event

Avian influenza A(H5N1)

The outbreak of H5N1 avian flu across a number of poultry farms in the Bekaa Valley in April has thrust the issue into the limelight. The outbreak was discovered after a number of birds died at several farms in the area. An emergency plan has been duly activated to contain the spread of this disease. There has been no single case of H5N1 reported in humans in Lebanon.

Editorial note:

H5N1 is a type of influenza virus that causes a highly infectious, severe respiratory disease in birds called avian influenza (or "bird flu"). Human cases of H5N1 avian influenza occur occasionally, but it is difficult to transmit the infection from person to person. When people do become infected, the mortality rate is about 60%.

Bird flu symptoms in people can vary. Symptoms may start out as normal flu-like symptoms. This can worsen to become a severe respiratory disease that can be fatal. However bird flu in humans may not always look like typical cases of flu.

Almost all cases of H5N1 infection in people have been associated with close contact with infected live or dead birds, or H5N1-contaminated environments. There is no evidence that the disease can be spread to people through properly prepared and thoroughly cooked food.

Following the emergency plan approved by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) concerning the H5N1 bird flu in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture (MoAg), the High Relief Commission and the concerned authorities from the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Interior

Figure: Cumulative number of confirmed human cases for avian influenza A(H5N1) reported to WHO, 2003-2016.

Country	2003-2009*		2010-2014**		2015		2016		Total	
	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths	cases	deaths
Azerbaijan	8	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	5
Bangladesh	1	0	6	1	1	0	0	0	8	1
Cambodia	9	7	47	30	0	0	0	0	56	37
Canada	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
China	38	25	9	5	6	1	0	0	53	31
Djibouti	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Egypt	90	27	120	50	136	39	4	0	350	116
Indonesia	162	134	35	31	2	2	0	0	199	167
Iraq	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Lao People's Democratic Republic	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Myanmar	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Nigeria	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Pakistan	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
Thailand	25	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	17
Turkey	12	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	4
Viet Nam	112	57	15	7	0	0	0	0	127	64
Total	468	282	233	125	145	42	4	0	850	449

Security Forces, thousands of infected birds were executed and disposed of in several farms under experts' supervision.

The MoPH surveillance and response teams conducted in coordination with MoAg team, required investigation and provided prophylaxis treatment to farmers and their families, in the affected areas.

For successful reduction of the negative impact on human health and associated economic and food security consequences, it will be essential to strengthen animal and human disease surveillance, biosecurity and disease control programmes, in a context of a strengthened and close collaboration between Human Health and Animal Health Departments.

This includes appropriate animal vaccination programmes through joint efforts by the public and private sector in charge of animal health.

The MoPH announced to citizens present in infested regions to abide by the instructions provided by the Ministries of Health and Agriculture, as well as the security forces. Those suffering from any of the bird flu symptoms should instantly contact a doctor and inform the MoPH.

Cumulative Notifiable Diseases in Lebanon*

Disease	2015	2016**	Apr.	May
Vaccine Preventable Diseases				
Polio	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
AFP	75(9)	45 (5)	8 (1)	7 (0)
Measles	37(11)	19 (5)	4 (1)	7 (3)
Mumps	1400 (337)	288 (36)	121 (7)	39 (4)
Pertussis	37(6)	21 (5)	8 (0)	6 (3)
Rabies	0(0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Rubella	9(1)	5 (1)	1 (1)	1 (0)
Tetanus	3(0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Viral Hep. B	140(22)	21 (3)	8 (2)	13 (1)
Water/Food Borne Diseases				
Brucellosis	333(57)	72 (22)	23 (7)	3 (0)
Cholera	0(0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Hydatid cyst	14(1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Typhoid fever	473(50)	123 (0)	14 (0)	8 (0)
Viral Hep. A	877(159)	106 (16)	18 (1)	4 (0)
Other Diseases				
Leishmaniasis	32(23)	6 (6)	1 (1)	3 (3)
Meningitis	309(53)	170 (20)	40 (9)	28 (4)
Viral Hep C	65(3)	3 (0)	2 (0)	1 (0)

*Numbers in brackets refer to Syrian **as of 29 May 2016