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Hong Kong

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Imported Live Chickens Tested Positive for H7 Avian Influenza

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the News

Poultry and Products

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Approved By:

M. Melinda Meador

Prepared By:

Caroline Yuen

Report Highlights:

On December 30th, Hong Kong confirmed the presence of H7 avian influenza in live chickens imported from Mainland China and ordered the immediate closure of the city's wholesale poultry market and the destruction of 15, 000 birds therein. The market will be closed for 21 days for decontamination. Live chicken imports from the exporting farm in China are banned for at least 21 days.

Background:

Currently, Hong Kong has a daily population of approximately 17,000 live chickens, with 63 percent supplied by local farms and the rest from China. Given the growing number of H7N9 avian influenza (AI) human cases in China, Hong Kong started conducting Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing for H7 AI, and since January 2014, introduced the H7 serological testing to strengthen early warning against AI.

Under Hong Kong's avian influenza (AI) monitoring program, live imported poultry are required to pass AI (PCR and serology) tests prior to leaving their farm to indicate the poultry carry sufficient level of antibodies against H5 and are free of any AI virus. At the Hong Kong border, the Center for Food Safety collects blood and swab samples for serology testing and if AI positive, the tests proceed for verification through PCR testing.

On December 30th, swab samples from a Shenzhen, China consignment of live chickens tested positive for H7 AI and were subsequently confirmed by Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests after the birds had arrived at the Hong Kong wholesale market.

Reaction of the HKG:

The Hong Kong Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) declared the wholesale market an infected area and on the morning of December 31st, ordered the destruction of 15,000 live chickens, imported and domestic, in the wholesale market. According to OIE recommendations, the market will be closed for 21 days for decontamination.

In addition, the HKG suspended imports from the Chinese farm where the infected chickens originated. According to the protocol between Hong Kong and China, the source farm will not be allowed to supply live chickens to Hong Kong for at least 21 days and Chinese authorities will launch an investigation. Trade will be resumed only when both Hong Kong and Chinese authorities have accepted the investigation report and remediation measures. Although, other sources of live chicken supplies from China are not implicated in the suspension, in reality, the closure of Hong Kong's only wholesale market impacts trade in live chickens for the next 21 days.

Next Steps:

According to Hong Kong AI risk management program, all live chickens have to be distributed through the wholesale market. This requirement has previously caused domestic farmers serious economic loss as their non-infected birds in the wholesale market have been slaughtered along with the imported infected birds and their marketing opportunities lost for 21 days. During the last episode in January 2014, local wholesalers received HK\$30 (US\$3.60) in government compensation for each chicken culled, and breeders received about HK\$30 ex gratia for each chicken that could not be sold at a prime age due to the suspension of trade.

This time, AFCD is trying a new program. AFCD will increase AI surveillance of the approximately 30 local chicken farms, and once all operations are confirmed negative for AI, local chickens can be dispatched to a temporary checkpoint before distribution to retail and catering outlets. This temporary checkpoint will not be available for live chicken imports.