

Update on Avian Influenza

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The cumulative number of cases is 291 and the deaths are 172 as of Mid April. Since the beginning of the year there have been 28 confirmed human cases (in Indonesia, Nigeria and Egypt) of which 14 have died. The overall survival rate is 59.4% for human avian patients in Egypt in contrast with the survival rate of 21.7% in Indonesia. The success in Egypt is encouraging and is possibly due to prompt initiations of antiviral therapy.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation stated that Egypt, Indonesia, and Nigeria have not been able to contain the disease, effectively making them reservoirs of the virus for possible spread to other countries.

The latest on H5N1 virus

The viruses isolated in Thailand from

the Phichit province belonged to the genotype Z, whereas the virus isolated from the Nakhon Phanom province belonged to the genotype V. Experts voiced concern over the possibility that the 2 different genotypes, called 'sub-clades', of the H5N1 bird-flu virus found in Thailand could meet and merge into an unknown and 'unpredictable' mutated form.

Latest information on H5N1 Human Vaccine

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) stated that clinical trials with 2 doses provided protection to just 45% of male adults who received the highest dose of the Sanofi Aventis avian vaccine. The first vaccine against H5N1

influenza strain to seek FDA approval is thus even less effective than previously thought. However the US is supporting its use as an interim measure until better versions come along, being the only vaccine available right now. Studies have been limited and no data is available on its effect on women, children and those who had the seasonal influenza vaccination. The FDA expressed concern that the immune response among persons who took the Sanofi vaccine was not as strong as its seasonal influenza counterpart.

- The European Medicine Agency has recommended approval of Focetria by Novartis and Daronrix by GlaxoSmithKline as experimental bird flu vaccine for use in humans. 