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Second alert: 30 November 2023 | Update on Avian Influenza A (H5N1) in Cambodia

SUB-LOCATIONS AFFECTED

- Trapeang Russey village, Damnak Sokrom commune, Dong Tong district, Kampot province, southwest Cambodia
- Previous cases were reported in Svay Rieng province and Prey Veng province, south Cambodia



FOLLOW-UP DESCRIPTION

Cambodia's Ministry of Health reported two cases of influenza A(H5N1) on November 24-25, 2023, both from the same village in Kampot Province. Both cases were females, one aged 20-25 and the other under five years old. The first case, showing symptoms of fever, breathlessness, and cough, died in the hospital four days after seeking medical help. The second case, identified during heightened

surveillance after the first case, is currently hospitalized and being treated. Investigations revealed both had contact with sick backyard birds in the preceding month. The Ministry is actively investigating the source, coordinating responses, conducting health education campaigns, and monitoring contacts to prevent further transmission.

This brings the total H5N1 cases in Cambodia for the year to six. H5N1 infection in humans is severe, has a high mortality rate, and is internationally notifiable under health regulations.

Laboratory investigation shows the viruses, as indicated by phylogenetic analysis, fall within the H5 clade 2.3.2.1c with close similarity to the viruses that have been circulating in Cambodia and Southeast Asia since 2013-2014. The sequences cluster most closely with the viruses from the two human cases reported in October 2023.

Since the virus continues to circulate in poultry, particularly in rural areas in Cambodia, the potential for further sporadic human cases can be expected. In these two cases, while human-to-human transmission cannot be ruled out, it is likely there were separate exposures to the viruses from sick and dead chickens.

The Ministry of Health's national and sub-national rapid response teams, with support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Environment, have initiated and coordinated the detailed investigation of the avian influenza outbreak in Kampot Province including searching for additional suspected cases and contacts, collecting and testing samples from backyard birds and conducting health education campaigns to prevent transmission in the community.

WHO Advice

Despite recent influenza A(H5N1) cases, the World Health Organization (WHO) maintains its current recommendations for influenza surveillance and public health measures. WHO emphasizes the importance of global surveillance to track changes in emerging or circulating influenza viruses and encourages timely virus sharing for risk assessment. The public is advised to avoid contact with high-risk environments like live animal markets/farms, practice good hand hygiene, and report sick or unexpected animal deaths to veterinary authorities. Those exposed to infected birds or contaminated areas and feeling unwell should seek healthcare and inform providers of their exposure. WHO discourages travel or trade restrictions and special traveler screenings, and reminds countries to notify WHO immediately of any laboratory-confirmed human infection caused by a new subtype of influenza virus, even without evidence of illness, as per the International Health Regulations (2005).

The ABVC team will continue monitoring this event and will provide updates if there is any new information.

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ASEAN Biodiaspora Virtual Center

ASEAN Biodiaspora Virtual Center Office, Ministry of Health (Kementerian Kesehatan),
Jakarta, Indonesia

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