

Environmental sample from Mai Po Nature Reserve tests positive for H5N1 virus

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) was notified today (December 8) by the University of Hong Kong (HKU) that an environmental sample taken from the Mai Po Nature Reserve (MPNR) tested positive for H5N1 subtype highly pathogenic avian influenza virus.

A research team of the School of Public Health, HKU collects samples from the MPNR regularly for avian influenza surveillance. Among the environmental samples collected on December 6, a sample of faecal dropping has been confirmed to be positive for H5N1.

An AFCD spokesman said the World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong, the managing organisation of the MPNR, has stepped up cleansing and disinfection of tourist facilities including bird hides and floating boardwalk. Disinfectant carpet has been placed at the entrance of the MPNR for visitors to disinfect the soles of their shoes. In addition, the AFCD is closely monitoring the situation of the birds in the MPNR and has put up notices to remind visitors to pay attention to personal hygiene.

There are no chicken farms within three kilometres of the MPNR. Since winter set in, the AFCD has strengthened avian influenza surveillance and been closely monitoring the situation of the local poultry farms and wholesale market. Poultry farmers, pet bird shop owners, and licence holders of pet poultry and racing pigeons are reminded from time to time to ensure that proper precautions against avian influenza have been implemented.

"People should avoid contact with wild birds and live poultry and their droppings. They should clean their hands thoroughly after coming into contact with them. Members of the public can call 1823 for the AFCD's follow-up if they come across birds suspected to be sick or dead, including the carcasses of wild birds and poultry," the spokesman said.

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will continue to be vigilant over live poultry stalls. It will also remind stall operators to maintain good hygiene.

The Department of Health will keep up with its health education to remind members of the public to maintain strict personal and environmental hygiene to prevent avian influenza.

The AFCD, the FEHD, the Customs and Excise Department and the Police will strive to deter the illegal import of poultry and birds into Hong Kong to minimise the risk of avian influenza outbreaks caused by imported poultry and birds that have not gone through inspection and quarantine.

All relevant government departments will continue to be highly vigilant and strictly enforce preventive measures against avian influenza. Health advice about preventing avian influenza is available on the AFCD website at www.afcd.gov.hk.