



PRESS STATEMENT

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PNG Poultry free of Avian Influenza virus

Good news for the poultry industry and its consumers in PNG.

A recently published surveillance study has found that there is no evidence of avian influenza or bird flu circulating in Papua New Guinea poultry populations.

The study *Surveillance of avian influenza viruses in Papua New Guinean poultry, June 2011 to April 2012*, was published recently in the journal *Western Pacific Surveillance and Response*.

This study was conducted by the PNG Institute of Medical Research (IMR) in collaboration with the National Agriculture and Quarantine Inspection Authority (NAQIA) and Centre of Excellence for Influenza Research and Surveillance at the St Jude's Research Hospital in USA.

"The aim of the study was to investigate whether or not bird flu is circulating in PNG's poultry populations and also assess its risk on the industry and human health," said Dr Yazid Abdad, head of the Environmental and Emerging Diseases Unit at IMR.

Over 500 poultry samples from chickens and ducks were collected by NAQIA staff in 82 sub-sites in 14 provinces from June 2011-April 2012 as part of their routine surveillance programme. The samples were then sent to IMR laboratories for analysis.

Throat and cloacal swabs were tested to detect if there were any current infections of bird flu circulating in the poultry population while blood samples were used to determine past exposure to the virus.

"All samples tested at the laboratories at IMR and St Jude's Research Hospital found no detection for both current and past infection of bird flu," said Dr Abdad.

This is the first study to investigate the presence and distribution of avian influenza virus in poultry populations in PNG.

"Although there was no bird flu detected in poultry in this study, this does not necessarily mean that our country is at low risk for an outbreak," he said.

The recent detection of the avian influenza strain – H5N1 in Papua, Indonesia, is a concern for PNG as we share a land border with them.

Also the recent outbreak of Newcastle Disease virus in poultry populations in the north-west of PNG highlights the potential for the incursion of such diseases into the country.

"As such it is important that active long term sentinel surveillance continues or established at sites where there is a risk of avian influenza introduction especially along the borders."

"This is so that outbreak mitigation steps can be rapidly implemented in the event these diseases appear in PNG."

Avian influenza is a virus that is only found in aquatic birds but occasionally crosses natural species barriers and infect other bird species and mammals such as humans, pigs and horses.

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