

REPORT DISEASE AND HEALTH HAZARD NEWS OF INTEREST ALONG THE BORDER

December 5 - 11, 2024

WEEKLY EVENTS

- On December 5–6, 2024, a disease report in the Democratic Republic of Congo indicated an outbreak of a respiratory illness in Kwango Province specifically in the rural Panzi district, located in the southwest of the Democratic Republic of Congo. From November 10, 2024 to the present, 376 cases have been identified, with 143 fatalities. Most of the deceased are young children. The symptoms observed in patients include respiratory issues resembling influenza, such as high fever, headache, runny nose, and difficulty breathing. The World Health Organization (WHO) is currently collaborating with the Ministry of Health of the DRC to investigate the cause and provide recommendations for controlling the outbreak. Thailand's Department of Disease Control has instructed relevant agencies to closely monitor and follow the situation, particularly at international disease control checkpoints, which serve as the first line of defense for travelers entering Thailand from abroad. Thailand already has surveillance measures in place for travelers from the DRC, as it is one of the 42 countries designated as a yellow fever endemic area.
- On December 6, 2024, Thailand's Ministry of Public Health convened a meeting to prepare for haze and dust particles in 2025. Four key measures include public communication on health protection, real-time air pollution updates via digital platforms, online appointments for respiratory issues related to pollution, and emergency health operations if pollution levels exceed $75.1 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for two consecutive days.

KEY AVIAN INFLUENZA SITUATIONS OF 2024: STAY ALERT, NOT ALARMED

Global developments in avian influenza from February to December 2024 highlight the need for vigilance among the general public and related governmental and private agencies. Close monitoring and preparedness are critical to preventing outbreaks in Thailand. Beyond public health challenges, avian influenza could lead to significant economic losses at household, industrial, and national levels.

Key Global Updates of 2024: In February, A 2-year-old child contracted avian flu in Australia while traveling in India and developed critical symptoms. In March, Vietnam reported a fatality in Khanh Hoa province in the south. In August, Ghana identified a 5-year-old with H9N2 avian flu. Though unclear, reports suggest proximity to infected poultry. In September, Cambodia confirmed 10 H5N1 cases since the start of 2024, with two fatalities. Nine of the 10 cases involved individuals under 18. In October, Washington State, USA, reported 11 cases of H5N1, mostly presenting mild upper respiratory symptoms. All had contact with infected poultry. In November, Oregon recorded its first avian flu case. The USA reported 55 cases nationwide since January, including 32 with infected livestock exposure and 21 with poultry exposure. In December, Vietnam reported an H5N1 case in Long An province linked to 100 dead poultry near the patient's residence. On December 6, Arizona, USA, identified two poultry farm workers with mild symptoms pending laboratory confirmation. Countries like the UK, USA, EU, and Japan have stockpiled H5 avian flu vaccines for pandemic preparedness.

Recommendations for Thailand include strengthening laboratory surveillance systems, alerting healthcare facilities to enhance screening for poultry exposure and high-risk behavior, promptly reporting abnormal poultry deaths or respiratory symptoms linked to animal exposure within seven days of symptom onset, and reporting suspected cases under the Communicable Diseases Act (2015) and conduct joint investigations with relevant agencies under the One Health approach.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OFFICIALS

Officials should coordinate with local health and livestock agencies to inform residents about the global avian flu situation. They should highlight reporting abnormal poultry deaths to local leaders or livestock officers, avoiding consuming poultry of unknown death causes, burying carcasses appropriately, promoting personal hygiene practices like cooking food thoroughly, wearing masks, and washing hands before meals. If patients in the area exhibit flu-like symptoms and have a history of poultry contact, living near poultry, or being in proximity to areas where poultry have died of unknown causes within 7–14 days prior to illness onset, this must be reported to local public health and veterinary authorities. Healthcare providers encountering flu patients should also take a detailed history of risk factors. If symptoms meet the avian influenza case definition, a report should be promptly submitted via the designated surveillance channels.

CONTACT

oic.ddc@gmail.com
02-5903832
www.ddc.go.th/oic

INFORMATION COLLECTED AND ANALYZED BY

Multisectoral Capacity Development Program for Public Health Emergency Detection and Response in Border Areas

Office of International Cooperation, Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand
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Sources

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