

## Working to prevent and contain avian influenza

Abt Associates mobilizes human and animal health experts, environmental and agricultural specialists, private and public organizations, and community members to prevent, control, and respond to avian influenza (AI).

Abt Associates has experience and demonstrated success in strengthening health systems in more than 40 countries. This systems approach informs our work in AI preparedness as we work to ensure that countries have adequate capacity to execute an effective AI prevention, surveillance, and response plan through the following:

- Preventing and managing outbreaks: Abt Associates is working with communities to ensure both that they avoid contact with dead birds and animals possibly carrying the H5N1 virus and that they respond appropriately when an outbreak is identified in either animals or humans.
- Creating surveillance networks: Building on years of experience in strengthening the infectious disease surveillance and response capacity in countries in Africa and Asia, we are developing comprehensive networks of public and private agencies and community organizations to ensure that possible cases of AI in humans are correctly identified and quickly reported to appropriate authorities.
- Designing effective response teams: We are supporting efforts to ensure that proper protocols and procedures are in place to collect and transport samples for virus isolation and identification by local and/or international labs, that human AI cases are immediately isolated and treated, and that additional safeguards are taken according to standardized procedures.

Abt Associates has provided direct technical assistance for AI preparedness and response for a number of countries, as described in the following sections.

### Azerbaijan

At the request of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) mission, Abt Associates is providing ongoing technical assistance to strengthen the ability of Azerbaijan's existing infectious disease reporting system to detect and report suspected human cases of AI. Azerbaijan confirmed 11 human cases (including five deaths) of AI during 2006. Support for these activities is being provided through an existing bilateral contract (PHC Strengthening Project). Major activities include the following:

- Development and adoption of a standard case definition for use in detecting and reporting possible and probable human AI cases
- Development and adoption of a national surveillance protocol, and revision and adoption of reporting forms
- Training district-level clinical and public health/surveillance staff in the use of the procedures and protocols
- Development and implementation of support, supervision, and monitoring and evaluation procedures to track the effectiveness (sensitivity, specificity, and coverage) of the protocols' use

Important linkages between human disease surveillance structures and personnel and animal/bird disease surveillance are being forged to ensure the necessary, effective collaboration and communication between the two systems.

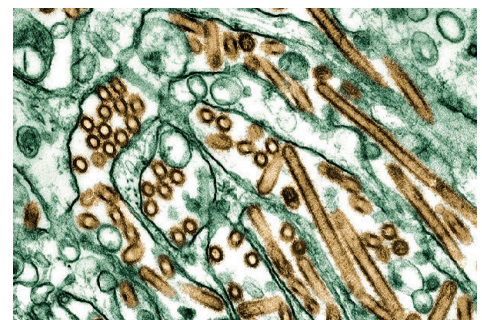
### Georgia

For the World Health Organization (WHO) country office and the USAID mission, Partners for Health Reform<sup>plus</sup> (PHR<sup>plus</sup>) staff provided technical assistance to prepare an AI brochure, which was disseminated to 25,000 health workers in Georgia to give them background informa-

*In January 2004, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of avian influenza (AI), a strain that normally infected birds, had killed several people in Southeast Asia. In January 2006, leaders from 100 countries pledged \$1.8 billion to help fund a global response. Although worst-case scenarios of a global pandemic killing thousands of people have not materialized, health authorities around the globe remain very cautious owing to the potential ability of the H5N1 virus to change into virulent forms that could be more easily transmitted from animals to humans and from human to human.*

tion on AI in birds, its transmission, and instructions on containment procedures. The brochure was reviewed by in-country collaborating organizations and was subsequently finalized and distributed to health workers nationwide during November-December 2005.

Detection of AI in Croatia, Kazakhstan, Romania, Russia, and Turkey, as well as suspected cases in other eastern European countries, highlighted the need



to ensure that countries in the region have the capacity and tools needed to detect AI promptly and implement measures to prevent and limit human infection.

## Ghana

At the request of USAID, Abt Associates undertook a rapid assessment of the Ghanaian government's preparedness to deal with AI. Ghana has created a multi-sectoral Avian Influenza Working Group (AIWG) to coordinate planning efforts. AIWG is led by the head of the National Surveillance Unit (NSU) of the Ghana Health Services/Ministry of Health and includes representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture and Wildlife as well as WHO, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and USAID. Abt Associates responded within one week of a request from USAID/Ghana to provide technical assistance to AIWG in three areas:

- Conducting a rapid assessment to identify strengths and gaps in the existing epidemic surveillance and response systems/structures within the agricultural and health sectors.
- Drafting the national AI preparedness and response plan, using the WHO template as the framework. This required expanding the template to include necessary actions within the agricultural sector and coordinating these actions with those in the health sector.
- Building capacity of district and regional veterinary services department staff to conduct active and ongoing surveillance of unusual deaths in wild and domestic bird populations.

A central issue was coordinating the efforts of agencies and organizations that do not usually collaborate, including wildlife and veterinary services, human health agencies, private laboratories that could quickly and accurately assess AI, and numerous community and nongovernmental organizations. The Abt Associates team helped develop a comprehensive national preparedness and response plan

and established an interministerial forum to present planning activities to the public and energize planning and coordination structures.

Ghana's AI plan will form the basis for discussion between the country and donors to mobilize necessary resources. The plan will be developed to correspond with the phases of the pandemic so that resources can be accessed and actions taken that correspond to the evolving threat of AI.

## Tanzania

Abt Associates epidemiologists, with funding from USAID, provided technical assistance to Tanzania to support the development of a protocol for active AI surveillance in humans at the district level. Abt Associates also coordinated Tanzania's National Avian Influenza Joint Task Group meeting in September 2006. Attended by representatives of all sectors from both mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar, as well as by development partners, the meeting resulted in plans to develop a detailed one-year work plan to ensure that efforts are under way to implement Tanzania's National AI Preparedness and Response Plan.

Our assistance puts into place several building blocks required for additional laboratory and human and animal surveillance-strengthening activities that are to be implemented through a USAID-funded cooperative agreement with the University of Minnesota. Abt Associates will build on its *PHRplus* infectious disease surveillance-strengthening work to develop AI-specific training materials and job aids for use in Tanzania, resulting in a first step toward integrating AI into the list of reportable priority infectious diseases of the existing national surveillance and response system.

## Vietnam and Laos

Abt Associates was recently awarded a three-year project aimed at preventing, controlling, and responding to AI in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region by the USAID Regional Development Mission in Bangkok, Thailand. The three-year award, made under the Population, Health and Nutrition Technical Assistance and Support Contract, was the largest competed USAID award for AI. The project provides urgently needed assistance in Vietnam in the Mekong and Red River delta areas, where outbreaks have occurred, and in high-risk urban areas in Laos, which have been identified as vulnerable.

Abt Associates and its partners are helping local governments and communities develop skills to identify and report suspected animal and human AI cases, and to adopt safer poultry-keeping and consumption practices. The project will pilot test biosafety approaches to reduce the risk of infection, and will develop targeted behavior change communication strategies for farmers, poultry workers and marketers, health personnel, and the general public. Using an integrated, multi-sectoral approach addressing both human and animal health issues simultaneously, the project will rapidly mobilize communities to be aware of the health risks, to increase prevention and surveillance capacity, and to do so by collaborating with local, national, and international institutions.

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