



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

General Working Group of the Health Security Committee Meeting

Friday, 12 April 2024 – 10:30-12:30

Summary Report

Chair: Head of Unit, European Commission, DG SANTE B2

Participants: AT, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, IS, LIE, NO, DG SANTE, DG ECHO, DG HERA, EMA, EFSA, ECDC, WHO

EU/EEA only

Agenda points

1. Opening of the meeting and objectives
2. Possible strategies for the use of Aflunov in Ireland: technical and strategic considerations
3. Options for One Health preventive measures to mitigate the risk of a pandemic due to avian influenza
4. Overview of the regulatory approval of Zoonotic Influenza vaccines
5. Update on the availability of the avian influenza vaccine
6. Discussion to share information about planned vaccination approaches between countries
7. AOB

Key messages:

1. Opening of the meeting and objectives

DG SANTE explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss possible strategies on the use of vaccines for avian influenza, and to follow up on the epidemiological situation in the EU. An HSC opinion was adopted last year on zoonotic avian influenza with a **One Health approach**. DG SANTE informed that during the physical HSC of 17-18 April, there is a specific session on avian influenza.

2. Possible strategies for use of Aflunov in Ireland: technical and strategic considerations

Ireland presented their technical and strategic considerations for the possible use of a zoonotic avian influenza vaccine in humans. There have been 2 outbreaks in poultry in November 2022, but no outbreaks since and there have been no cases in wild birds since September 2023. In 2022 the human and animal health Avian Influenza group updated the guidance on risk stratification of exposed persons, on personal protective equipment, infection prevention and control, and case and contact management. Ireland is working towards **strengthening avian flu preparedness and response**, including a cross-border collaboration mechanism. They are also developing vaccination strategies to include seasonal influenza and zoonotic avian influenza vaccines. Ireland explained that they are identifying **target groups** for vaccination and are discussing about what could be the most effective and feasible strategy, including pandemic and pre-pandemic vaccination strategies, as well as administration for the zoonotic avian influenza vaccine.

3. Options for One Health preventive measures to mitigate the risk of a pandemic due to avian influenza

ECDC and EFSA's presented options for preventative and mitigation measures on how to alleviate the risk due to the avian influenza. In the EU/EEA avian influenza is widespread in **wild bird populations**. There have been some spill overs to wild and domestic animals, some outbreaks in poultry and occasional outbreaks in mammals. Transmission from infected animals to humans remains a **rare event globally**. The viruses continue to diversify globally, and with the migration of wild birds, other avian influenza virus strains are currently circulating outside of the EU. Overall, there have been two cases of avian influenza cases reported in the United States (since 2022), with only **one human case** of avian influenza reported in this current outbreak (2024). EFSA gave an overview on the drivers for evolution and adaptation of the avian influenza, including intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the virus. EFSA also provided options for **One Health mitigation measures** including preparedness and capacity, biosecurity, surveillance, communication, and vaccination of animals as well as vaccination of humans against seasonal influenza. ECDC and EFSA referred to their [joint scientific report](#) published in early April.

4. Overview of the regulatory approval of Zoonotic Influenza Vaccines

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) provided an overview on the current state of play on **the market authorization for vaccines for avian influenza**. There are three vaccines against avian flu: Aflunov, "Zoonotic influenza vaccine Seqirus" and Celldemic. Aflunov was authorized in 2010 and contains an old strain which is no longer cross reacting with strains that are circulating. "Zoonotic influenza vaccine Seqirus" was authorized in October 2023, and a post-authorisation variation was submitted in November 2023 to update the strain. Celldemic has received a positive opinion from the [Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use](#) but is pending an EC decision.

5. Update on the availability of the avian influenza vaccine

DG HERA gave an update on how the **Joint Procurement** for the purchase of pre-pandemic Zoonotic Influenza Vaccine Seqirus is being coordinated. Participation in the Joint Procurement Agreement is voluntary for Member States. DG HERA explained that the Zoonotic Influenza Vaccine Seqirus is an adapted vaccine based on Aflunov with the more contemporary strain to protect against influenza caused by the H5N8 strain circulating in Europe. The initial shelf life for the vaccine is 12 months, and this is the only pre-pandemic zoonotic influenza vaccine authorized by the EMA for the EU market. The negotiated procurement procedure with Seqirus started in August 2023, and the procurement procedure should be concluded in the coming weeks.

6. Discussion to share information about planned vaccination approaches between countries.

DG SANTE invited Member States to share information on their vaccination strategies. Some countries commented that this is the employer's responsibility, others are discussing the target groups as well as potentially vaccinating risk groups with regular seasonal influenza vaccines to provide them with cross-protection. Involvement of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs) network was suggested as a potential forum to further support development of countries vaccination strategies.

7. AOB

During the Health Security Committee meeting on 20 March, the EC and EU MS/EEA countries were informed about Italy's decision to reinforce sanitary surveillance and public health measures at points of entry to **prevent the spread of Dengue virus infection**. It was agreed to activate the EWRS incident management module for reporting EU and EEA national public health measures.

The module has been created and DG SANTE invited Member States to report on the national public health measures, undertaken or planned, related to the increase of dengue virus infections.

DG SANTE also informed that there will be an online HSC meeting on 5 June specifically on **vector-borne diseases**.