



Press Release

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UN expert on bird flu arrives in Vientiane on 5 April

Dr. David Nabarro who leads the coordination of the United Nations response to avian influenza will be meeting with high-level dignitaries in Lao PDR from the 5 to 6 April. While in Lao PDR, he will offer UN system support for the implementation of the Government's National Avian Influenza Control and Pandemic Preparedness Plan.

In a recent interview, Dr. Nabarro warned, "The [avian flu] pandemic will kill when it comes. But more seriously perhaps, it will do massive economic and social damage. We need to be able to deal with both the human consequences and the economic, social and governance consequences if we're going to survive it. And believe me, the pandemic could start tomorrow. By the time the pandemic starts, preparation will be too late. So, you should be doing this now, and that's my message."

Since the beginning of the current outbreak in Dec 2003, human cases of avian influenza have been reported from China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Iraq, Thailand, Turkey and Viet Nam. Total number of human cases of the avian influenza virus H5N1, reported to WHO is 186 laboratory confirmed case and 105 deaths as of 24 March 2006.

Laos reported its first and only wave of bird flu outbreaks in the poultry population in early 2004. A total of 45 outbreaks (mainly in commercial farms) were reported in the Provinces of Vientiane Capital, Champasak and Savannakhet. However, it is suspected that more outbreaks occurred in rural areas that were either not detected or not reported. A total of approx. 155,000 poultry either died of disease or were culled during the outbreak. No human cases were reported. Since March 2004, there is no scientific evidence of new bird flu cases in poultry in Lao PDR

The main health risk currently is to people who are in close contact with infected poultry, such as families with backyard flocks and poultry workers in wet markets or live animal markets.

The Government of Lao PDR is taking strong measures to ensure that bird flu is detected and stopped at the source. With support from a United Nations interdisciplinary team, the Government completed a national plan to safe guard citizens from the threat of bird flu. This plan has been well received internationally and the Government has been praised for developing such a comprehensive plan. The Lao PDR Government is setting up a National Avian Influenza Coordination Office (NAICO) to manage the National Avian Influenza Control and Pandemic Preparedness Plan.

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