

Avian influenza: controlling the disease at its animal source does not justify inhumane killing methods on farm

The OIE stresses the need for veterinary services worldwide to address urgently outbreaks of avian influenza in poultry. However, as the international reference organisation for animal welfare, the OIE is committed to alerting the international community to the necessity to use appropriate methods when killing infected and in contact birds.

The global fight against avian influenza in some cases necessitates the killing of birds. Concern is being expressed not only by animal welfare organizations worldwide, but also by the media and the general public that, in many cases, this killing is not being carried out in an appropriate manner.

The OIE emphasises that early detection and rapid response mechanisms are crucial to the successful control of the disease and to minimizing the number of animals needing to be killed to prevent the spread of the virus. Specific guidelines have been adopted by all 167 OIE Member Countries with regard to appropriate methods for the killing of animals (including birds) for disease control purposes.

In particular, these guidelines recommend that:

- When animals are killed for disease control purposes, methods used should result in immediate death or immediate loss of consciousness lasting until death; when loss of consciousness is not immediate, induction of unconsciousness should not cause anxiety, pain, distress or suffering in the animals.
- There should be continuous monitoring of the procedures to ensure they are consistently effective with regard to animal welfare, operator safety and biosecurity.
- The operational activities should be led by an official veterinarian who has the authority to appoint the personnel in the specialist teams and ensure that they adhere to the required animal welfare and biosecurity standards. When appointing the personnel, he/she should ensure that the personnel involved has the required competencies.
- A specialist team, led by a team leader answerable to the official veterinarian, should be deployed to work on each affected premises. The team should consist of personnel with the competencies to conduct all required operations; in some situations, personnel may be required to fulfil more than one function. Each team should contain a veterinarian.

The OIE considers that there is an essential link between animal welfare and animal health.

The standards in the *OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code* on surveillance for avian influenza and on measures guaranteeing the safety of international trade in poultry and poultry products represent the cornerstone in the global fight against avian influenza in birds and for avoiding a potential human pandemic.

The complete guidelines on appropriate methods for the killing of animals for disease control purposes. are available online in the *OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code* at http://www.oie.int/eng/normes/mcode/en_chapitre_3.7.6.htm.