



MALAWI GOVERNMENT

PRESS RELEASE

SENSITISATION OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC ON IMMINENT RISK OF BIRD FLU INTO MALAWI

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development in liaison with the Ministry of Health would like to inform the general public about an imminent threat of the deadly disease "Avian Influenza", commonly known as Bird Flu, and the implications. This follows a recent outbreak of Bird Flu in some parts of Africa, namely Cameroon, Egypt and Uganda that has killed thousands of wild birds as well as domestic poultry.

Avian Influenza is a viral disease of poultry which has spread through many countries of the world in recent years causing massive losses in poultry flocks. Several subtypes of avian influenza viruses can occasionally infect humans causing sickness and death.

In view of these human health implications, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is collaborating with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to track and assess the risk of public health concerns from influenza viruses.

Cognisant of the increased threat, and potential risk factors such as geographical proximity of Uganda to Malawi, border porosity, and movement of animals and animal products, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development is closely monitoring the developments of this deadly disease. In particular, it is monitoring reports on the global situation with respect to the disease trend and the status in other countries within the region.

The National technical committee on avian influenza recently convened an emergency meeting of stakeholders from the key sectors namely livestock, health, wildlife and information. Among other issues, the committee resolved to reactivate its key activities including


reviewing and operationalising the national preparedness/response framework which was prepared in 2009. The existing preparedness framework sets out the requirements for early detection and response including communication in the event of an introduction of the disease into Malawi. In the event of an emergency outbreak, the framework provide for:

- Operation and roles of an Avian Influenza Task Force;
- identification of resource requirements;
- implementation of emergency preparedness and contingency plans;
- communication strategy;
- establishment of response teams and protocols;
- Resource mobilisation for surveillance, rapid diagnosis, and response.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water development and the Ministry of Health would like to assure all Malawians that they are doing all they can to protect the nation from ravages of any Avian Influenza outbreak in the country, be it through losses of livestock or risks to human health.

The two Ministries will also ensure that the general public is regularly updated on the status of this deadly disease.

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