

Chapter 1: Introduction

Canada, Mexico and the United States face a growing threat posed by the spread of avian influenza and the potential emergence of a human influenza pandemic. The highly pathogenic H5N1 virus, which re-emerged in Asia in late 2003, has already spread to Europe, the Middle East and Africa. While the virus has not yet reached North America, the three countries must be prepared for the day when it—or some other highly contagious virus—does.

The North American Plan for Avian and Pandemic Influenza (Plan) outlines a collaborative North American approach that recognizes that controlling the spread of avian influenza or a novel strain of human influenza, with minimal economic disruption, is in the best interest of all three countries. It outlines how Canada, Mexico and the United States intend to work together to prepare for and manage avian and pandemic influenza.

The Avian And Pandemic Influenza Threat

An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges against which the majority of the human population has no immunity. It spreads easily from person to person, causes serious illness, and can sweep across the country and around the world in a very short time.

Although a pandemic influenza virus, by definition, causes disease in humans, it can arise from mutations in an animal virus, such as avian influenza. Wild waterfowl are the natural reservoir for influenza A viruses, which generally do not cause disease in the birds that are infected. When these viruses are passed to domestic chicken and turkey populations, however, they may mutate and become more pathogenic.

The H5N1 Eurasian strain of the influenza A virus has infected birds in over 59 countries and jurisdictions and has resulted in the deaths, through illness and culling, of over 240 million birds. The virus is now endemic in parts of Southeast Asia, present in long-range migratory birds, and unlikely to be eradicated in the short term.

The H5N1 virus is capable of infecting a wide range of hosts, including humans. Although the virus has not yet

shown an ability to transmit efficiently among humans, there is concern that it will acquire this capability through genetic mutation or exchange of genetic material with a human influenza virus. If this does not happen with the currently circulating H5N1 viruses, history suggests that another novel influenza virus will emerge and cause the next influenza pandemic.

Influenza pandemics have occurred intermittently over the centuries. The last three influenza pandemics, in 1918, 1957 and 1968, killed approximately 40 million, two million and one million people worldwide, respectively. Although the timing of an influenza pandemic cannot be predicted, history and science suggest that the world will face at least one influenza pandemic this century. A worldwide outbreak of a new influenza virus could result in hundreds of thousands of deaths, millions of hospitalizations, and hundreds of billions of dollars in direct and indirect costs to North American economies.¹

North American Cooperation To Address The Threat

In March 2006, the leaders of Canada, Mexico and the United States agreed to advance the agenda of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP)² by addressing the threat of avian and pandemic influenza. Cooperation on avian and pandemic influenza is one of five major priorities outlined by the leaders to be addressed within the SPP.

Since the social and economic health of the three countries is closely intertwined, political leadership and cooperation at all levels is needed. The security and

1 U.S. National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, November 2005

2 In March 2005, the Prime Minister of Canada, the President of Mexico and the President of the United States announced the establishment of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) to increase security and enhance prosperity among the three countries through greater cooperation and information sharing. The leaders met again in March 2006 to assess the progress of the SPP and to reaffirm their commitment to enhancing the security, prosperity and quality of life of citizens within North America. The SPP continues to establish leader-level priorities for trilateral and bilateral initiatives, give existing efforts additional momentum, and create new programs and initiatives where necessary and appropriate.

prosperity of the three countries are interdependent and complementary.

While recognizing the differences in respective legal and governmental frameworks among the three countries, their governments acknowledge the need to work collaboratively and with all levels of government, the private sector and among non-governmental organizations to combat avian and pandemic influenza.

The three leaders set out a framework for cooperation on avian and pandemic influenza, which includes a series of principles to guide collaboration. The leaders also announced their intent to establish an avian and pandemic influenza Coordinating Body to follow up on commitments. The development and implementation of the North American Plan works in conjunction with other trilateral mechanisms and ongoing efforts under the SPP to fulfill the vision set out by the leaders.

Principles for Cooperation

At the March 2006 meeting in Cancun, Mexico, the leaders of Canada, Mexico and the United States determined that the following principles are to guide collaboration on all stages of avian or pandemic influenza management:

- Share information among our governments in an open, timely and transparent manner;
- Adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach that incorporates animal and public health aspects in managing avian influenza outbreaks and influenza pandemics;
- Ensure coordination within our respective national governments on all aspects of emergency management for an avian influenza outbreak or a human influenza pandemic, by building on existing mechanisms of cooperation and strengthening these mechanisms as required;
- Coordinate actions and leverage our respective capacities to ensure that rapid and effective steps are taken to deal with avian influenza outbreaks or a human influenza pandemic in North America;
- Advise one another in advance of making any decision that could seriously affect the other countries;

- Base our actions on the best available science and evidence-based decision making;
- Agree that the imposition and removal of veterinary or public health measures on the movement of people, animals and goods, under our national laws and international obligations, will not be more restrictive or maintained for a longer period than necessary to achieve the veterinary or public health objective, so as to avoid unnecessary interference with the movement of people and goods within North America;
- Ensure that the business continuity plans of our respective governments consider the highly interconnected nature of our economies; and
- Strive to utilize clear and consistent messaging to the public and international organizations that is proactive, timely and accurate.

A Comprehensive Approach

Given the broad health, social and economic impacts of an avian influenza outbreak or influenza pandemic, the three countries recognize that their approach must be comprehensive. Preparing for such an emergency requires coordinated action nationally, internationally and by all segments of society. The purpose of this Plan is to enhance collaboration among Canada, Mexico and the United States in order to:

- Detect, contain and control an avian influenza outbreak and prevent transmission to humans;
- Prevent or slow the entry of a novel strain of human influenza to North America;
- Minimize illness and deaths; and
- Sustain infrastructure and mitigate the impact to the economy and the functioning of society.

Although influenza will not physically damage critical infrastructure, systems may be weakened by the absence of essential personnel in the workplace or the diversion of resources. This Plan, therefore, extends beyond the health and medical sectors to include provisions in relation to critical infrastructure and the movement of goods and services across our borders.

The North American Plan for Avian and Pandemic Influenza provides a framework for:

- The basic structure and mechanisms for trilateral emergency coordination and communication;
- Collaboration on the prevention, control and eradication of highly pathogenic strains of avian influenza;
- Collaboration on a North American approach to pandemic influenza preparedness and response, including border monitoring and control measures to stop or slow the spread of a novel human influenza virus; and
- Collaboration on a North American approach to keeping critical infrastructure and essential systems functioning properly in the event of an influenza pandemic.

The Plan recognizes and builds upon the core principles of the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (International Partnership), the standards and guidelines of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the World Health Organization (WHO)—including the International Health Regulations (IHRs) as well as the rules and provisions of the World Trade Organization (WTO)—and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It also considers the role of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in coordinating global strategies for the control and eradication of highly pathogenic avian influenza, as well as the role of the United Nations (UN) System Influenza Coordinator in ensuring cooperation and coordination within the UN system on initiatives to address the avian influenza epidemic and threat of a human pandemic.

The International Partnership was launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2005. The goals of the partnership include:

- Elevating the avian influenza issue on national agendas;
- Coordinating efforts among donor and affected nations;
- Mobilizing and leveraging resources;

- Increasing transparency in disease reporting and improving surveillance; and
- Building local capacity to identify, contain and respond to an influenza pandemic.

The WHO has developed international guidance on pandemic preparedness and response, including a series of six pandemic phases.³ The WHO efforts are intended to improve international coordination, transparency and management of risk in responding to such threats. The WHO's international guidance formed much of the basis for the three countries' planning for North American pandemic preparedness and response.

OIE provides guidelines, advice and standards to prevent, diagnose and respond to outbreaks of notifiable avian influenza (NAI) within the Terrestrial Animal Health Code (2006) and the Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals (2004). These documents also provide standards and guidelines outlining how countries should provide international notification and continue to trade in poultry and poultry products prior to, during and following an outbreak.

Similarly, the FAO's role in combating highly pathogenic avian influenza is to facilitate direct technical and resource assistance to help national governments align their prevention, control and response efforts with OIE guidelines. The FAO channels support to infected countries to assist their efforts to control the disease and provides assistance to countries at risk of introduction of the disease. These efforts are now augmented by a rapid response capability through the newly established FAO-OIE Crisis Management Center.

This Plan is not intended to replace existing arrangements or agreements. As such, each country's laws are to be respected and this Plan is to be subordinate and complementary to domestic response plans, existing arrangements and bilateral or multilateral agreements.

3 http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/influenza/WHO_CDS_CSR_GIP_2005_5/en/index.html