



Avian Flu Preparedness

Guidance for the Tourism Sector

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

Version September 2007

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Introduction

Dear Colleague

As the UN Agency for Tourism, UNWTO has the responsibility to support coordinated UN preparedness & response planning among its government, private sector & civil society constituency.

UNWTO is working closely with the UN System Influenza Coordinator (UNSIC), the World Health Organization (WHO) & the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). We have joined UN Coordinator David Nabarro's team, taking special responsibilities in relation to communication as it affects travelers.

We have acted to focus membership attention and to strengthen Secretariat support capacity.

We have also taken an initiative to convene and manage an industry wide **Tourism Emergency Response Network TERN** which brings together the key organizations across the sector to exchange ideas, share information and ensure consistency of messages to travelers.

We are committed to assisting tourism public and private stakeholders to prepare and respond to a potential influenza pandemic & to engage appropriately in national preparedness plans.

F. Frangialli, Secretary General, UNWTO



Purpose

- This guidance material has been developed by the World Tourism Organization as part of the UN System's global preparedness for a possible avian flu pandemic.
- It is aimed at all stakeholders in the tourism sector – public or private – but particularly Tourism Ministries, who are urged to become fully involved in national preparedness efforts and to appoint a focal point for response.
- To assist in this work, a special Risk Management Working Group has been set up with representatives of countries that are most actively concerned.
- UNWTO Assistant Secretary-General Geoffrey Lipman has been appointed to act as avian influenza spokesperson, coordinate with other organizations and supervise the work of the Secretariat, which includes a daily bulletin on avian influenza and a web based information flow.
- The guidance has been reviewed by the World Health Organization and by the UN System Influenza Coordinator.
- Effective **15 June 2006** and updated monthly.
- Available on the UNWTO website www.sos.travel

For further information please contact avianflu@unwto.org Tel +34915678118

If you are represent an organization and wish to join the **Tourism Emergency Response Network (TERN)** please send a message to avianflu@unwto.org.

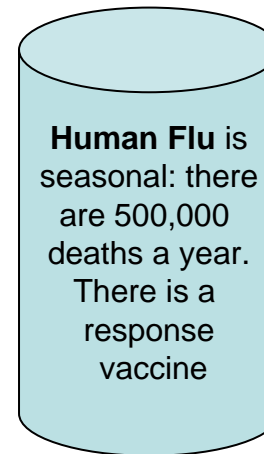


Avian Flu Basics

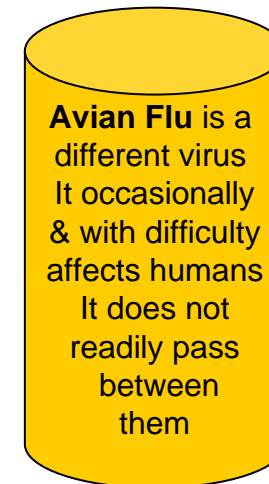
- Highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 (commonly referred to as avian flu or bird flu) is spreading rapidly among wild birds in Asia Africa and Europe. Public health measures are being taken in all countries where the H5N1 avian influenza virus has been detected. Close contact with birds has led to occasional infection in humans, but there is as yet no evidence of sustained person-to-person transmission.
- While all bird species are thought to be susceptible to infection, domestic poultry flocks are especially vulnerable to infections that can rapidly reach epidemic proportions. It is extremely contagious and fatal, with a mortality approaching 100%. Birds can die on the same day that symptoms first appear. Avian influenza viruses can be readily transmitted from farm to farm by the movement of live birds, people (especially when shoes and other clothing are contaminated), and contaminated vehicles, equipment, feed, and cages. These viruses can survive for long periods in the environment, especially when temperatures are low.
- An additional, significant cause of the international spread of the virus in birds became apparent for the first time in 2005. It seems that some migratory waterfowl are now carrying the H5N1 virus, sometimes over long distances, and may introduce it to poultry flocks in areas that lie along their migratory routes. In some rare cases the H5N1 virus has infected animals.
- The current avian influenza outbreaks are having an indirect impact on the tourism sector with some visitors avoiding destinations where the few human cases have occurred – even if those cases were unrelated to tourism and only occurred after close contact with infected poultry. The effect of avian influenza on the tourism sector is likely to increase if and as the virus spreads.

Avian Flu Basics

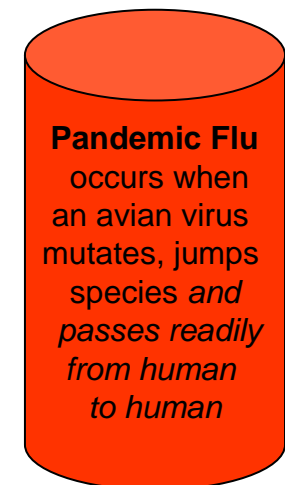
- **There are three kinds of “influenza” involved**
 - existing “human flu”: which is seasonal, with more than 500,000 deaths a year around the world and which is treated routinely by vaccination.
 - existing “avian flu”: which is a different virus spreading rapidly amongst birds (particularly poultry) and which can spread to animals and occasionally humans through direct contacts. It does not pass easily across species or between humans
 - potential “pandemic flu” occurs when an avian flu virus mutates, jumps species and passes readily from human to human
- **To move to a pandemic phase the virus must**
 - Mutate
 - Jump species
 - Spread readily between humans
- **H5N1 has shown the capacity to**
 - Spread rapidly amongst birds
 - Be deadly
 - Cross species barriers
- **H5N1 does not yet pass sustainably between people.**
- **But the more that avian flu spreads the greater the risk.**
 - Avian flu deaths could significantly increase amongst humans
 - A mutation of the virus could occur that would create a pandemic
- **Hence the current global strategy of**
 - containment and eradication of H5N1 avian flu
 - while actively preparing for a potential pandemic



Human Flu is seasonal: there are 500,000 deaths a year. There is a response vaccine



Avian Flu is a different virus It occasionally & with difficulty affects humans It does not readily pass between them

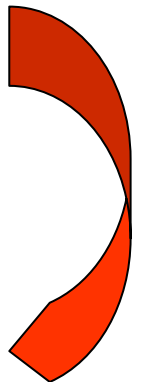


Pandemic Flu occurs when an avian virus mutates, jumps species and passes readily from human to human

Avian Flu Basics

- *The World Health Organization (WHO)* is the responsible agency for tracking pandemics and it has developed a classification table which is set out below. UNWTO is liaising closely with WHO and will keep members advised of any changes to this alert status.
- Phases 1-3 are considered as the preparatory stage, allowing time for measures to be put in place to deal with the pandemic should it occur.
- Phases 4-6, the action stage, could include travel recommendations and would be the right time to activate crisis response plans
- The current level is Phase 3, as of early 2006, with some 320 human infections over a 4 year period

- **Phase 1 and Phase 2:** are inter-pandemic phases during which no new Influenza A virus subtypes have been detected in humans but a circulating animal Influenza A virus subtype has been identified which poses a substantial risk of human disease.
- **Phase 3:** human infection with a new Influenza A virus subtype has been identified but there is no spread of the virus from human to human (or most rare instances of spread, and only to a close contact). **We are currently in Phase 3.**
- **Phase 4:** small clusters are identified with limited human to human transmission, but spread is highly localized suggesting that the virus is not well adapted to humans yet.
- **Phase 5:** large clusters are identified but human to human spread is still localized. This suggests that the virus is increasingly better adapted to humans but not yet fully transmissible. Risk for a pandemic is substantial at this stage.
- **Phase 6:** increased and sustained viral transmission is seen in the general population.



Tourism Impacts

- The practical recommendations contained in this guidance material will help stakeholders be better prepared – not only for avian influenza and a potential human pandemic – but also for any other crisis that may occur in the future
- Should the H5N1 virus mutate and become easily transmissible from person-to person, the impact of a new human pandemic influenza virus could be significant. Some estimates predict millions will die, the global economy will suffer a major setback and travel will be badly disrupted. The timeline for any such eventuality is unpredictable but the global community is preparing for the possibility and the tourism sector is involved.
- If a new human pandemic influenza virus emerges, the World Health Organization would make travel recommendations to its Member States, under the provisions of the *International Health Regulations (2005)*, including a number of public health interventions, which could have an impact on domestic and international travel.
- National governments would execute their own avian flu plans which could have similar impacts.
- Preparation by National Tourism Administrations and stakeholders in the public and private sector tourism promotion boards and private sector companies requires the commitment of human and financial resources.
- **It is important to react to this situation in a measured way. The industry has proven its resilience to external crises in recent years and tourism authorities have learned better how and when to respond.**
- **Stakeholders who are prepared will respond more effectively, recover more rapidly, minimize job and revenue loss and above all help tourists more responsibly in any crisis situation.**

It is clear that a number of these measures may fall within the jurisdiction of differing government departments or industry bodies. This is generally the case for transport and particularly air transport where airlines and airports have over the years developed guidance material for crisis response. Care should be taken to avoid duplication or jurisdictional disputes. National level coordination of actions that affect tourists is the goal.

Name a focal point for Avian Flu preparedness

UNWTO has requested Member States and Affiliate Members to designate one person to act as a focal point and to spearhead preparations for Avian Flu and related issues. Depending on the organization, this person need not be the director or top official, but rather someone who already has responsibility for health and safety issues or for relations with government or the tourism operating sector. The name of the designated focal point should be forwarded to the UNWTO Secretariat so that he/she can be informed of international preparations and can, in turn, update UNWTO on national initiatives.

Meet with public health officials

It is essential that tourism authorities meet with public health officials and become involved in national planning for Avian Flu and a potential human pandemic influenza. Most countries have already developed contingency plans to manage a potential human pandemic and it is vital that the tourism industry is familiar with those plans and injects industry specifics into such planning. Tourism authorities must also lead the sector in education on these public Health matters as they affect the sector.

Preparedness

Join the National Avian Influenza Council

Many countries already have a National Avian Influenza Council that coordinates the activities of government departments and other concerned bodies. By joining this council, the tourism industry will be able to voice its views on preparedness, express concerns about the impact of lost visitors and revenues on tourism businesses and propose measures to help the industry during a pandemic. It will provide an opportunity to work with other government departments to plan measures to handle visitors stranded by a pandemic.

Form a “Tourism” Emergency Response Group A national industry-wide Avian Flu framework should be put in place with representatives of all the sectors of the tourism industry. It is vital that this group bring together all the different sub-sectors, including aviation, hotels, cruise lines, tour operators, travel agents, transport companies, tourist guides, marketing organizations, attractions and restaurants.

National task force members would be responsible for formulating common messages about avian flu and raising awareness about the potential impact within their own industry area. They could also be charged with coordinating plans for the tourism sector that would cover areas such as:- preparedness: evacuation procedures: care for tourists who become ill: repatriating nationals who become ill abroad: domestic travel: staffing of essential service: relief measures for tourism industry. (See Annex 1 for examples)

Secure political support

These measures, particularly issues such as fiscal relief for tourism businesses, will require political support at the highest levels of government. Such support is more likely to be forthcoming by demonstrating how important tourism is to the national economy, by showing how the sector united in its preparations for avian flu and by gaining the commitment of national leaders for a responsible and professional risk management approach to a crisis should it occur.

Allocate a budget for responding to Avian Flu

Preparations and response measures will require significant human & financial resources. Mounting a tourism recovery campaign could prove even more costly, although experience with SARS showed that tourism returned to the affected destinations quickly once the “all-clear” was issued. Most organizations will choose to use part of the budget of each department involved, such as marketing, planning, safety, communications, etc. Additional government emergency funding for preparedness can be sought, as well as setting aside part of the marketing budget to be used on recovery campaigns or to sustain the industry if travel restrictions are in effect.

Compile reliable figures on tourism’s contribution to the national economy

Reliable information should be compiled on tourism’s contribution to the national economy in terms of foreign exchange earnings, tax revenues and employment. Show the multiplier effect of tourism employment and tourist spending on the national economy and compile a fact sheet on tourist arrivals from major markets and their spending patterns. This information will be needed in dealing with other government departments, for workshops and for answering media inquiries during the response phase. The fact sheet can also be placed on the media section of the destination website. The possible impact should not be overstated. UNWTO can provide guidance on how this can best be shown in relation to national accounting systems and the Tourism Satellite Account.

Conduct research into illnesses and hospitalization of tourists

Factual information should be collated on health problems that affect tourists in the destination and incidents of hospitalization during a normal tourist season. This will serve as a benchmark for determining the need for health services during a human influenza pandemic and help to put any human cases into proper perspective. For example, if two tourists were to be infected in your destination, this alarming news could be contrasted and minimized with information on normal tourist illnesses in the previous year. At the same time it is important to be realistic and recognize the distinctions and characteristics of a pandemic. Factual information is useful for comparison, but purely promotional linkages should be avoided.

Develop a staff operations plan for Avian Flu

Forecast and allow for employee absences during a human pandemic due to factors such as mortality, personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, school and/or business closures, and public transportation interruptions. Determine the minimum operating staff needed during a human pandemic and the replacement staff required. Cross-train personnel and develop alternative transport options so staff can report for work. Establish duty rosters now.

Create a Virtual Emergency Framework

Use modern technology to establish a crisis management program by distance connection. Ensure that key staff have access at home to a computer, broadband links and voice over internet communications. Conduct regular drills

Stay in touch with international organizations

Web links are the key to information flow.

The World Health Organization will provide the key indicators on avian flu and pandemic developments

In cooperation with the UN System Influenza Coordination (UNSIC) group, UNWTO is putting together a comprehensive response with basic information and preparedness tools located on the Organization's website. It is setting up a best practice information exchange. All UNWTO members should keep the Organization informed of their national preparedness measures and response plans. Plans can be shared in written form or by attending meetings of the UNWTO Risk Management Committee, so that members can learn from one another.

For transport ICA, ACI and IATA are coordinating guidelines and information flows. Regional tourism bodies, such as PATA, and other international organizations, such as IFTO, IH&RA and UFTAA can also provide useful guidance material and agreed procedures in their special fields.

TERN provides additional material across the spectrum of organizations and the tourism value chain.



Preparedness

Name a spokesperson

The spokesperson does not need to be the top official. In case of a human pandemic, it is quite likely that the Director or General Manager would be too busy working with other government officials to attend to incessant media demands. However, the spokesperson should be someone with good communications skills and enough authority to answer questions and speak without a time-consuming authorization process.

Update databases of all tourism partners and government agencies

Contact information for key partners often changes. Invest resources in updating databases that will be needed in an emergency. In addition to including key international media and local journalists, make sure your tourism partners receive news directly from you rather than through the media. Include the domestic operating sector as well as foreign tour operators and transport companies that send tourists to your destination. Include other branches of government so they can be readily informed about the response of the tourism industry.

Make sure adequate communications equipment is in place

Make regular check of essential communications equipment. Ensure computer hardware & Internet bandwidth is sufficient to handle mass emails. Train staff and back-up personnel in database management and email broadcast programs, as well as emergency website updating. In the heat of a crisis, it may take too long to rely on outside providers to update the destination website. Be sure your internet, phone and fax links to UNWTO are current and fully operational. The web link is www.unwto.org/avianflu/index.htm

Communicate more

Communicate more, in good times as well as bad. Communicate more frequently through news releases, email bulletins or by enhancing the news content on the destination website. Look for news items that appeal to the widest possible number of people or focus on an unusual or little known tourism product. Where destinations are already experiencing a decline in arrivals due to fear of Avian Flu, news should focus on business as usual and the very low risk to tourists, in order to promote confidence in key generating markets.



Preparedness

Provide health and safety information on website

Tourists are more interested than ever in holiday safety. While traditional thinking has been that the tourism industry should not talk about security matters, recent research shows that today's consumers want assurances that the destination they select is concerned about their safety. Post health and safety information on an easily accessible page of the destination website, including emergency contacts, consumer protection information and, in the case of human avian influenza infections, a detailed map showing the exact location of the outbreak, as well as clear information on containment measures in place.

Build a working relationship with local media

While it is important to communicate with the international media in major tourism generating markets, it is equally important in a crisis to communicate well with the local press corps. When there are problems, local media reports are picked up internationally in a matter of minutes. It is therefore recommended that relationships with local journalists be developed, through special receptions or educational seminars to help them better understand the levels of risk and how the tourism industry might be affected, as well as the importance of tourism to the national economy.

Respond immediately to any factual errors

The credibility of any tourism destination depends on honest and transparent communication. Likewise, the viability of any media outlet depends on its credibility. Factual errors or exaggerations that appear in the media must be rectified immediately. For example, a headline "Asian Travel Halted" when in reality travel recommendations only relate to a few countries demands a phone call to the editor followed by a letter requesting a correction. Post Tsunami, the international media is more aware about the impact that inaccurate reporting can have on tourism flows that sustain the economies of many destinations in the developing world.



Preparedness

Prepare “dark page” for avian influenza

Prepare a hidden page on the destination website that can be activated immediately in case of necessity. The “dark page” should include emergency contact information for tourists and for travel industry partners as well as a space for news, where the latest details about a human pandemic influenza outbreak can be posted rapidly by someone inside your own office. Train back-up personnel to operate the “dark page” in case the human pandemic influenza affects tourism staff. Provide this information on a confidential basis to UNWTO so that we can support your efforts.

Issue advice for travelers going to areas of potential risk

As part of its awareness building activities, tourism authorities – in cooperation with public health officials and the foreign ministry – should issue precautions for people traveling to areas at risk for Avian Flu as part of awareness-building measures. Sample travel advice can be found in Annex 2. Other examples can be found on the WHO website (www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/) and the US Centers for Disease Control website (www.pandemicflu.gov).

Conduct travel industry workshops

Travel industry workshops on avian influenza and a potential human pandemic influenza can be useful in raising awareness about the risks and the preparedness measures being undertaken by your organization. A tourism crisis often provides an opportunity for a diverse and often competing industry sectors to cooperate for the greater good. It is a time when solid government leadership is needed.

UNWTO is running a series of regional simulations during the year 2007 – details are posted on the website www.unwto.org/avianflu/index.htm. It will also provide distance learning material for workshops.

Response

Should a new subtype of the influenza virus with sustained human-to-human transmission emerge, phase 5 of the WHO plan will go into effect & travel recommendations may be made by WHO to delay or avert a pandemic. For tourism officials, management of the crisis will move from the preparatory stage in phase 3 to the response in phases 4, 5, and 6.

It is important to remember that the tourism sector – through the UNWTO – is working in cooperation with the United Nations system. **Tourism officials should encourage people to follow travel recommendations.** The tourism sector must accept that travel may be disrupted for a period of time and work with public health officials to ensure that destinations adopt the appropriate health measures so that travel recommendations can be modified and/or withdrawn as the situation changes.

Call emergency meeting of the industry-wide Avian Flu Task Force

As soon as Phase 4 of the pandemic begins, an emergency meeting of the Avian Flu Task Force should be called. The response plan for the tourism sector will be activated and members of the task force will begin to implement it. Especially in the event of airport closures or flight cancellations, it is important to work quickly in clearly defined areas of responsibility. The Avian Flu Task Force should try to maintain continuity of internal communication

Care for victims

The immediate tasks in case of an outbreak of a human influenza pandemic will involve caring for the victims, not only tourists who may have been infected – these people will be taken care of by health authorities. The responsibility of the tourism sector includes caring for visitors who want to leave and are perhaps stranded, as well as those who want to stay or are forced to remain. Other victims might include tourism companies or hotels that cannot continue to operate normally due to lack of staff or due to lack of incoming tourists. It is important to remember that efficient and compassionate management of a crisis situation can actually enhance your image and reputation.



Response

Coordinate with other government agencies

Coordination among government agencies will be a top priority during a pandemic. Relationships developed during the preparatory period – with public health authorities, foreign affairs officials and law enforcement agencies – will bear their fruit and will be instrumental in avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring that the concerns of the tourism sector are listened to.

The tourism sector must be kept informed about the spread of the disease and national efforts to control it. The Avian Influenza coordinating unit at UNWTO and your regional representative should also be kept updated on the current situation

Activate tourism business continuity group

An emergency public-private sector tourism promotion & marketing group should be formed and hold regular sessions as soon as the human influenza pandemic reaches level 4. During the crisis, focus on joint promotions to attract domestic travelers – if domestic travel is permitted – and special events to keep the industry united. Extra marketing and promotion will be necessary even though the experience of SARS showed that travel picks up quickly following a disease outbreak,.

Take advantage of the crisis period to plan strategies & joint campaigns to bring back travelers so no time is lost once the pandemic has either been successfully contained or brought under control. Ideas for tourism recovery activities can be found in the UNWTO booklet *Crisis Guidelines for the Tourism Industry*, which can be downloaded from the Organization's website.

Keep tourism industry and media informed

Clear, honest, rapid and abundant communication is the key to good crisis management. If and when Phase 5 of the global pandemic preparedness plan is reached it is essential that all tourism partners – locally and internationally – are kept informed as events evolve and measures are taken to address the crisis. Stay in touch with the public through the media and through the destination website. Good crisis communications also means no news blackouts and no categorical reassurances, such as “It is completely safe here”. Avoid speculation and stick to the facts about what is being done to bring the situation under control. Enlist the help of sympathetic media outlets in getting your messages out.



Response

Send email bulletins

Communication with travel industry partners is easy and economical through email news bulletins. The objective is to maintain credibility and avoid panic among key travel industry partners through frequent communication, so that they can learn about the real situation directly from you rather than through a third party, such as the media or industry rumours. Positive messages, such as “We are working hard to get through this crisis and are confident that we will soon be back better than ever,” should form the underlying communications strategy.

Activate the “dark page” of website and update daily

For the public as well as the travel trade, a hidden webpage prepared in advance should be activated during Phase 5 of the WHO global influenza preparedness plan. It should be a news-driven page that includes emergency contact numbers, information on outbreaks of the virus updated daily and a detailed map showing the location of outbreaks in relation to major tourism centres. For concerned families of tourists visiting a place where an outbreak of avian influenza or human pandemic influenza has occurred, the website can refer inquiries to a special pandemic influenza tourism hotline. Links to the UNWTO website can be set up

Create and staff telephone hotline

A tourism hotline will be necessary in the case of an outbreak of avian influenza or human pandemic influenza in a major tourism centre or if tourists are evacuated from the destination. Families and friends will be concerned about their loved ones in the affected destination and will need a number to call for information. The hotline should develop a script for answering the most frequently asked questions and attempt to maintain a list of the whereabouts of tourists affected by the outbreak of the disease. It will be necessary to staff the hotline with people who can converse fluently and authoritatively in the languages of your major tourism generating markets

**Look to UNWTO for support and material.
And please give us any ideas you have on these guidelines or related matters**



Tourism Emergency Response Network

TERN - the **T**ourism **E**mergency **R**esponse **N**etwork was established in April 2006 as a worldwide resource for information exchange & consistency of messages relating to Avian Flu and Tourism. It is open to any organization – global, regional, national or local that links components of the tourism value chain.

It is convened and managed by UNWTO. Its other core members are African Travel and Tourism Association (ATTA)-Airport Council International (ACI)-American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA)-American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA)-Asociación Latinoamericana de Transporte Aéreo (ALTA)- Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA)-Association of European Airlines (AEA)-European Travel Commission (ETC) International Association Transport Association (IATA)-International Council of Cruise Lines (ICCL)-International Federation of Tour Operators (IFTO)-International Hotel and Restaurant Association (IHRA) National Tour Association (NTA)-Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA)-United Federation of Travel Agent's Associations (UFTAA).

The organizations have agreed that planning for the potential evolution of the virus to a pandemic form is a common concern and committed to:

- Work closely with the UN System Influenza Coordinator (UNSIC), the WHO & other involved UN agencies;
- Share real-time information and ideas;
- Give clear, concise and geographically specific public messages.

Part of this collaboration is the running and further development of the web portal ww.sos.travel by the UNWTO, which provides the basis for an open industry information network to enhance avian flu preparedness. The current TERN message is set out below

- **Avian Flu is a disease impacting fowl**
 - There are rare cases where the disease has passed to animals or humans.
 - No efficient human-to-human transmission strain has developed.
 - Public education reduces the risk of avian to human transmission.
- **There is no threat at present to tourists and there is no case for restricting travel**
 - If traveling to flu-infected localities, the best advice is to avoid contact with live birds of any variety.

TERN September 2007