

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE AVIAN INFLUENCE AND INFLUENZAL PANDEMIA

1. Danger of infection due to avian influence

- Are human and avian influences the same thing?

No, they are influenzal forms caused by different virus

- When we hear that the avian influence has come in Europe, what does it mean?

The fact that some animals have been affected by the virus H5N1 while men did not.

- Is it possible for an Italian citizen to fall ill of avian influence?

The only possibility is to get in touch with an ill animal, alive or just dead, eventuality that regards exclusively breeders or butchers. But, it has to be underlined that so far the virus H5N1 has not hit the nail yet in any of our breeding; in fact epidemics of avian influence have come from less aggressive zone. So far the possibility to fall ill of avian influence for a common citizen is practically nothing.

- Is it the first time that the virus H5N1 go from animals to man?

No, there have been already some human cases in 1997 of influence from virus H5N1 in Hong Kong, with 18 ill people and 6 deaths; then the virus did not have any mutations.

- Can it be possible to fall ill of avian influence from another person (for example: from someone coming from the south-east Asiatic or Turkey)?

No, because so far the virus H5N1 does not present characteristics able to pass it from an ill person to another one. In fact no cases have been reported, in the world, that there are ill people without having had contacts with affected animals.

- How do the wild birds get controlled?

The Ministry of Health entrusted this task to the National Wild Fauna Institute, which made, as it did last year, a monitoring in the humid zones of the Italian land, Lombardy included. Beside, even the hunters have been sent to collaborate, for example giving the sanitary authorities eventual death animals.

- Are avian breeding in Lombardy safe?

Yes, all the avian breeding in Lombardy have been under official control of the veterinary Services of the ASL for years, which submits them to periodical inspections to verify the respect of the standards of bio safety and to the plans of monitoring to see the eventual presence of affected animals in time.

- In case of some cases of avian influences in the breeding, does the responsible authority know what to do?

Absolutely yes, the facts tell us: from 1999 so far we had 3 epidemics of avian influenza and the measures adopted by the Veterinary Services of the ASL have been very efficient containing the economic damages to the operators of the sector.

- If an epidemic of H5N1 occurred in breeding, people who live close to it should be worried?

People who should be put under control would be just the breeders, because they would have been in direct contact with the animals. For other people controls, assumption of medicines and added precautions are not necessary.

- Is it dangerous to keep company birds (small parrots...)?

Absolutely not, also because generally they are animals that stay in the cage and so they could not be affected by other birds. You should avoid the import and the purchase of birds that come from place where a form of epidemic of this disease is present, such as Asia.

- Can pigeons be a vehicle for avian influenza?

No, so far it has never been documented an infection by pigeons with avian influenza H5N1. Actually, pigeons can have avian influenza, but so far no cases of infection by H5N1 have been reported.

- Is it dangerous to get in touch with chickens when you cook it?

It is important to adopt the normal hygienic measures - for example clean your hands when you are done working with raw meat and eggs, keep the cooked food divided from the raw one, keep the untouched food in the refrigerator – useful for the prevention of all eventual diseases that could be passed (above all the salmonellosis). The possibility of being infected with the virus, even if it came from an affected animal, is instead nothing:

- *virus, in general, survive and reproduce themselves only in living creatures or just dead animals;*
- *the infection happens, for human being, inhaling affected materials and not through alimentary way*

- Are there any possibilities to get infected eating chickens?

A well cooked chicken meat is never able to pass the infection.

- Are avian meats coming from countries of the Far East a danger?

The imports of meats from countries of the Far East are forbidden.

There are many checks to see eventual important illegal imports that however do not regard the normal commercial canals.

Besides, all the avian meats produced from October, 17th must be labelled with the origin.

- Can there be people who become carriers of the virus of avian influenza and so they pass the influenza without being ill?

It cannot be out of question that in the zones in which there have been cases of avian influenza H5N1 there could be some affected people who do not show the symptoms, still, given that the virus H5N1 is not able to

pass in an efficient way from man to man, the risk of infection is practically nothing both for the people who show symptoms and for the eventual asymptomatic people.

2. Anti influenza vaccination

- If I vaccinate against the season influence do I have a protection, even if it is indirect, against an eventual avian influence?

No, not only the vaccine is not efficient against the avian virus of avian influence, - either in case of its mutation nor for passage to man – but it is not even able to increase generically the immune defenses: each vaccine is specific for the disease to prevent. This explains why even the people who had been vaccinated against the influences can contract, in the winter season; similar influential forms determined by other circulating virus, towards the ones there are no vaccines in disposal.

- Is it advisable in any case to vaccinate in the following days?

*The vaccination in disposal in these days in the ASL and in the Pharmacists is addressed against the virus of the seasonal human influence. **The advice is that first of all need to be vaccinated the people who, in case of disease, could have compliances (old people, chronic ill people as diabetics, cardio paths...).** Other people, so kids and healthy adults, can vaccinate to avoid the influence and in order not to stay out of school or work: illness is a discomfort for them, it is not a serious risk for their health. **So, what needs to be avoided is that too many healthy people ask for the vaccination, provoking a lack of doses for the people who actually absolutely need it.***

- Will there be enough vaccine for everybody? Could the Region or the Minister have it more if the request is high?

*The pharmaceutical industries produce the anti influential vaccine for the whole year, assigned it to the Countries who are involved (in general the epidemics start at the beginning of the south hemisphere in May - October, with an extension in the north hemisphere between November and April); in this way the quantitative addressed to Italy is decided in spring and it can not be increased too much (in this season the production will start for the Countries that will be reached by the epidemics after us). So the requests of quantitative way too high than 12.000.000 doses will not be considered: **it is for this reason that general invitations to healthy population to vaccinate, beside not to be objectively satisfied, risk to subtract doses to who really needs it.***

- If a person did not vaccinate in these past years and decided to do it now, should he/she do the recalling?

*No, the influential virus that will circulate in the following season – December to February – are really similar to those of the past years and so even a minimum immune memory is present in the whole population; **the recalling is advisable for kids under 9 who risk and who have never done a vaccine.***

3. Anti viral medicine

- Can it be useful to take some anti viral when the first symptoms of influence appear?

*Anti viral medicines always have to be taken on medical prescription. **The treatment of the seasonal influence with the registered anti viral also in Italy is however suitable also for the people who***

risk serious compliances who cannot be vaccinated. In these cases the duration of the influence is reduced, even if there are not studied in depth documentations about the utility in the prevention of the compliances.

The anti viral, both the one in disposal in Italy and the ones available in the close Countries, must not be used without the medical control, because, they could risk to induce resistances towards the influential virus.

- Is it useful to have some anti viral, even buying them abroad, to keep at home just in case?

No, the auto medication is absolutely forbidden. In fact if some cases of avian influences are verify in breeders or butchers, these people must be immediately treated in the qualified sphere and absolutely they do not have to auto administer the medicine.

In other people the eventual danger of infection would take place just in case of mutation of the virus and so, it would be however necessary that infected people would be treated and put under medical control.

- Can anti viral medicines be useful to prevent the avian influence?

Yes, but their use is limited to the people effectively exposed to infection and in defined circumstances by the Sanitary Authorities (first cases, sure diagnosis, lack of contra-indications...).

- If the pandemia came here, would there be enough anti viral for everyone?

The anti viral bought by the Minister and which will be bought in the following weeks - at this moment they are not commercialized medicines in Italy – would be useful just in the case in which the virus of the avian influence should change and pass from man to man: in this case, waiting for the production of the vaccine, people who should fall ill could be treated to reduce the compliances of the disease, **but especially people who risk a lot should be treated and not the general population.**

4. Various

- When will be able to have the vaccine against the avian influence?

The vaccine for man against the avian influence is not in production, because, not being a danger for men at the moment, there is no need to have it. Only in the case of its mutation it should be done an adequate vaccine for the new virus: it will take about three months. The Minister however stipulated an agreement with three pharmaceutical Societies available to produce a quantitative of about 36.000.000 doses; people to who address them will be defined in the National Pandemic Plan, with priority for the people responsible for public services.

- Are the following estimates on the number of deaths and ill people reliable?

The estimates, as they are, found themselves on hypothesis, which will be able to be valued only in the case in which the mutant virus will be isolated. It is possible that a major number of people, compared with the people usually involved in the seasonal influence, fall ill because it would not be an immune memory, while the mortality would be however high in the most delicate people – old and chronic ill people – and not necessary in the healthy population.

- According to the great pandemia of the past – Spanish, Asiatic – there would be more death people?

*The foreseen is difficult: surely compared to some decades ago the living conditions are better but, also for this, the number of old people or people with chronic and debilitated pathologies has been increased. **It is not to be eliminated the fact that, being the percentage of people at risk higher, the level of mortality could be more elevated.** Remember that the mortality in the actual influential epidemics regards only old people (about the 90-94% of the cases of death associated, the influence is observed in the over 65).*

- Is the virus of avian influence very aggressive and lethal?

*Compared to the diagnosed cases, an effective lethality occurred, but the data cannot be considered definitive, **because we should know the effective number of diagnosed cases (ill people + infected without symptoms).** Surely the avian virus does not have a high level of contagiousness for the human being, unlike the animals, because the registered cases, compared to the animal epidemics, are infinitively small.*

- When the virus which normally hit the birds can become dangerous for human beings?

This happens when the virus gets in touch with the human virus giving origin to a new virus capable of infecting people, too.

- How does this recombination take place?

Normally it happens in the human being and in the pork because they are the only two species that can be infected at the same time with the human and avian virus.

- What elements the forecast of pandemia is based on?

Being the influential virus aiming to the genetic variability – every year there are small mutations – and having had three great pandemia in the last century, the hypothesis of a complete mutation of an influential virus – human or avian – is not to be eliminated. In any case people started talking about the danger of pandemia some years ago, before the problem of avian influence came out.

- At this point should we stop hunting?

At the moment it does not occur, but the situation might change after the monitoring, which is taken place at European level regarding the animals at risk.