

And Africa?

By August 2006, 8 African countries were known to have been infected by the HPAI H5N1 virus: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan. This virus was introduced to Africa either through the commercial importation of eggs or day-old chicks from infected countries, or through migrating birds for whom Nigeria and Egypt are important winter destinations. Uncontrolled commercial movements between African states also should be considered. It is probable that the wide spread Egyptian epizootic (14 governorates infected by the end of August 2006) caused the contamination of Palestine, Jordan, and Israel. It is feared that the infection, starting from outbreaks in Egypt and Nigeria, will propagate itself and spread through countries of northern, western, and eastern Africa, in other words, throughout the entire African continent and the Arabian peninsula.



Industrial poultry battery, 2006 - Vincent Porphyre, © Cirad

The H5N1 virus is likely to cause heavy economic losses as much at the national level as at that of rural African families. The promiscuity of poultry and people in the villages increases the risk of human cases. The diversity of the ecosystems infected leads to the fear that the disease may become endemic, meaning that it may quietly circulate only to suddenly remerge given favorable climatic conditions or an encounter with an animal population receptive and vulnerable to the disease. The recommended control measures are slaughtering at an outbreak area and vaccination around the contamination point. These measures require the coordinated mobilization of local populations (supported by wide scale information campaigns), countries, and international assistance.

And Western Europe?

The H5N1 virus was introduced into Western Europe by wild birds coming from the East during the winter of 2005-2006. Only two commercial turkey farms were affected during this period: one in France and one in Germany. Past episodes of avian influenza in Europe allows one to think that official veterinary services will be able to control the health situation. Likewise, it should be possible to avoid the contamination of humans, or at the least limit it to exceptional cases. On the other hand, the economic losses in the commercial poultry sector already are enormous. The persistence of outbreaks in Eastern Europe and the spread of the epidemic in the Middle East and Africa will enable the menace to hover over all of Western Europe for several years.



Poultry farm above a fish pond in Cambodia, 2002 - Vincent Porphyre, © Cirad