What we can say about the situation

- The novel avian influenza virus H7N9 has been affecting humans in China since March 2013. Cases have been confined to China with the exception of one Chinese tourist visiting Malaysia.
- Nearly 40 percent of reported human infections have been fatal.
- H7N9 is one of many avian influenza viruses that cause “bird flu” – a flu-like disease affecting poultry and sometimes humans and other animals.
- Avian influenza viruses like H7N9 are transmitted via contact with the secretions, blood, excrement or other fluids from infected birds.
- H7N9 is circulating in poultry in China, but the extent of circulation is unknown. Extensive surveillance in poultry has not identified the virus outside of China.
- Most people infected with H7N9 had contact with live poultry or visited live bird markets before falling ill.
- Poultry infected with H7N9 show little to no signs of illness. This makes it hard to identify infected birds, which increases public health risk since it is difficult for people to know which poultry to avoid.
- According to WHO, there is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission. However, it is important to note that isolated, human-to-human infection may occur with close and prolonged contact.
- The genetic makeup of H7N9 allows the virus to infect mammals more easily than other avian influenza viruses. Due to this characteristic, it is especially important that H7N9 be contained to protect public health and reduce the risks of a possible pandemic.
- H7N9 can infect wild birds, but the potential for wild birds to transmit H7N9 has been considered low.
- With its own funding and that of USAID, FAO is currently helping countries in Asia and Africa to increase surveillance and preparedness to detect H7N9 and react to a possible incursion.
- FAO is advocating for intensified preparedness especially before the next flu season starts in the fourth quarter of 2014.

What we can say about FAO actions and priorities

- H7N9 threatens economies and poultry-related livelihoods via disruption of poultry production due to necessary control measures to contain the virus.
- FAO is calling for urgent investment to protect animal and human health and safeguard livelihoods and trade. FAO recommends increased preparedness and improved: i) surveillance; ii) biosecurity and risk management; iii) inspection and hygiene in markets; and iv) controlled poultry movement.
- With its own funding and that of USAID, FAO is currently helping countries in Asia and Africa to increase surveillance and preparedness to detect H7N9 and react to a possible incursion.
- Live bird markets play a key role in human/poultry infections in China. FAO is recommending continuing efforts in increasing hygiene and biosecurity in live bird markets, enhanced surveillance of markets plus tracing back positive infections to the farm(s) of origin.
- FAO Reference Centres are helping update laboratory protocols in line with internationally validated diagnostic tests through the OIE/FAO network of expertise on animal influenza (OFFLU).
- FAO is monitoring the situation closely through its network of decentralized offices and Reference Centres for Influenza. FAO is liaising with key partners, including OIE and WHO. FAO is recommending that international trade standards are upheld and imports coming from affected areas tested.