

Prevention of Pandemics

Geneva L20 Work Shop

May 15th, 2005

- Participants agreed that pandemic disease is a safe issue for a first L20 meeting. There is an underappreciated threat, inadequate infrastructure / response capacity, and risk of very high economic loss (border closing and quarantines). The issue is increasingly relevant to an international system where trade and other interconnectivities are continually growing.
- Participants believed that authorities are unprepared:
 - There are huge gaps in what should be a seamless web of surveillance activities,
 - Vaccine stocks are inadequate,
 - There are drastic medical personnel shortages.
- Participants confirmed there are no bridges between public health and agricultural veterinarian personnel. Institutional barriers between them need to be removed. We lack an early warning system that includes agricultural veterinarians in direct surveillance.
- There was a consensus that greater understanding of related animal behaviors and farming practices was needed to develop best practices (e.g. separate ducks and chickens that are currently raised together). India is an example of a country with a start on good practices.
- Trade considerations disadvantage global public health. Health considerations are low priority for Trade Ministers (e.g. trade and IP barriers to life saving products). There are few incentives/encouragement to adopt health related policies (e.g. vaccinated chickens in Hong Kong couldn't be sold in international market).
- Difficult financing issues constrain action. There are disincentives to report outbreaks and cull stocks – responsible behavior gets “whacked”. The free rider problem plagues creation of the required global insurance fund to assist with and hence report outbreaks.
- Leaders must catalyze action across health, agriculture, trade and finance ministries and across the WHO, FAO, WTO and Bretton Woods organizations.
- The required bridges – a coordinated plan to increase global vaccine capacity, and a global insurance solution - will not appear spontaneously.
- The business case is clear. We're unprepared. Leaders must protect against lives lost and high costs. Prevention is more effective than reaction. Even if avian flu attenuates, other virulent viruses are likely to appear. Only Leaders can jolt the system to build bridges and pool risks and efforts.