

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
Minority (202) 225-3641

June 29, 2015

The Honorable Nicole Lurie, M.D., M.P.H.  
Assistant Secretary for  
Preparedness and Response  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Dr. Lurie:

Pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on Energy and Commerce is examining emergency preparedness in response to the spread of avian influenza. The U.S. is currently suffering from the worst avian influenza outbreak in history.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is an extremely infectious and fatal disease in poultry and water fowl. Two sub-types (H5N2 and H5N8) have been found by the USDA in the United States and are spreading, causing widespread economic devastation and the deaths of tens of millions of birds.<sup>1</sup>

Influenza has the ability to mutate and potentially threaten public health. On June 2, 2015, the CDC issued a health advisory stating that it “considers these newly-identified HPAI H5 viruses as having the potential to cause severe disease in humans” and made recommendations to clinicians, state health departments, and the public. A CDC medical official further noted that “while we are cautiously optimistic that there will not be human cases, we must be prepared for that possibility.” HPAI H5 viruses also have the potential to threaten public health indirectly through pressures on the flu vaccine development process, which still mostly requires chicken eggs.

The current sub-types of avian influenza do not appear to infect humans, but there is concern they could infect swine, which have spread avian influenza to humans in the past.<sup>2</sup> GAO has previously reported that swine are particularly worrisome because they can become

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Enoch, “Biosecurity lapses among factors in spread of bird flu, USDA finds,” Agri-Pulse, June 15, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> CDC, “Transmission of Influenza Viruses from Animals to People,” (last updated August 19, 2014)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/viruses/transmission.htm>.

infected with not only swine influenza viruses but also human and avian influenza viruses. The World Health Organization cautions that pigs could play a role in the potential emergence of a pandemic virus. Iowa—the largest egg and hog producing state—has the most avian influenza infections of any U.S. state. Commercial poultry and swine operations are often located in close proximity of one another, exacerbating the threat of infection.

To assist the committee's oversight, please respond to the following questions by July 13, 2015:

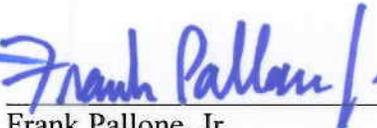
1. What steps has ASPR taken to ensure the flu vaccine supply, still largely reliant on chicken eggs for manufacturing, is protected against the spread of HPAI H5 viruses?
2. Has ASPR performed a risk assessment or data modeling on HPAI H5 viruses spreading to humans? If so, what did the risk assessment or data modeling show? How is ASPR coordinating with the scientific community on this issue?
3. Has ASPR assessed the capacity of the U.S. public health system (including the state and local public health agencies) and health care facilities to handle scenarios in the event that any of the HPAI H5 viruses spread to humans? If so, what do the assessments show? If not, why has no assessment been conducted?
4. What strategic planning could assist potential responses to HPAI H5 viruses in the event of a spread to humans? What additional planning would be needed?
5. What efforts are underway to develop vaccines against HPAI H5 viruses?

If you have any questions, please contact Alan Slobodin of the majority committee staff at (202) 225-2927 or Una Lee with the minority staff at (202) 225-3641.

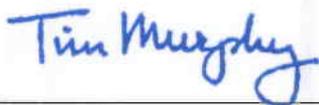
Sincerely,



Fred Upton  
Chairman



Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member



Tim Murphy  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations



Diana DeGette  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations