

05WELLINGTON908

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 WELLINGTON 000908 S

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DANIEL SINGER AND REBECCA S

DALEY, INR FOR LESTER AND BRUNETTE-CHEN, STATE FOR D (FRITZ), EAP/FO (STEPHENS), AND EAP/ANP NSC FOR VICTOR CHASECDEF FOR OSD/ISA ELIZABETH PHU NSC FOR VICTOR CHA PACOM FOR J2/J233/J5/SJFHQ E.O

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ID, PREL, NZ SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND'S AVIAN AND PANDEMIC I

NFLUENZA PLANNING UPDATE REF: A

SECSTATE 206992 B

WELLINGTON 704 Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Katherine Hadda, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d) 1

(C) Summary: Since launching a government-wide effort in June, the GNZ has vigorously planned for the possibility of avian and pandemic influenza entering New Zealand

Under the coordination of the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Inter-sectoral Pandemic Group (IPG) of thirteen ministries and departments in November released publicly a comprehensive Influenza Pandemic Action Plan

In developing its national plan, the GNZ has consulted closely with Australia and WHO officials, and has sought to shore up its inability to produce human vaccines by securing an agreement with an Australia-based manufacturer to provide priority access to a vaccine once it is developed

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(C) Beyond the vaccine weakness, New Zealand is well-positioned to execute its national strategy having mature animal and human surveillance programs, well-implemented vaccination administration programs, and having reviewed its legal authorities to implement quarantine and other social distancing measures

In October 2005, Prime Minister Helen Clark appointed veteran minister and

scientist Pete Hodgson as Minister of Health, further signifying the high importance of pandemic influenza and other health issues to the GNZ Embassy will provide a further update to this message following consultations with GNZ expert Marlene Castle next week
Castle was unavailable prior to the Ref A requested response deadline
End Summary
Preparedness/Communication -----

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(C) NATIONAL PLAN: The government of New Zealand in June initiated development of a comprehensive national plan to respond to avian and pandemic influenza, and released the plan publicly in early November
New Zealand is well-positioned to implement its national strategy
New Zealand's area of greatest weakness is that it does not have local capacity to manufacture human vaccines
The principal national planning document is available through the Ministry of Health at <http://www.moh.govt.nz/nhep>
The plan is expected to undergo continuing revision as a "living document," and is currently on its 14th version
Further planning documentation regarding animals is available through Biosecurity New Zealand at <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz>

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(C) RELIABLE REPORTING: There is no reason to doubt the government's truthfulness in reporting the scope of any disease outbreak among people or animals
New Zealand has a mature public health surveillance system, including two programs specifically dedicated to monitoring influenza: (1) a general practice (GP) sentinel disease and virological surveillance system operates annually during the winter months recording the daily number of consultations that fit the case definition of an influenza-like illness and (2) an ongoing virological surveillance is carried out by designated virology diagnostic laboratories, and by the ESR virology laboratory
Data collected from these laboratories is reported nationally in the Virology Weekly Report

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(U) Biosecurity New Zealand, within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's (MAF), manages the Animal Disease Surveillance program, including regular reporting of surveillance results and auditing of services purchased from contractors
In the last two years, almost 2,000 samples were collected from migratory waterfowl in the vicinity of arrival locations
No bird flu or highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses were isolated from

any of these samples, or from the less intensive sampling that was conducted in previous years

Fifteen avian influenza viruses have been isolated and characterized in New Zealand over the past 15 years

All were non-pathogenic

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(C) Presently, public health surveillance reports for reportable diseases in humans are published on a weekly cycle

Reports for disease in animals are reported on a quarterly cycle

Greater frequency of reporting of disease among animals would contribute to greater transparency by providing more timely and thus more relevant information

New Zealand's national plan provides for increased animal surveillance once the pandemic enters WHO Interpandemic Period Phase 2

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(C) PRIORITY TO GOVERNMENT: Preparing for an avian flu pandemic ranks highly among government priorities

Staff from the External Assessments Bureau (EAB) located within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, have been assigned to avian influenza threat

planning

The Director, David Kersey, has been seconded to the Officials Committee for Domestic and External Security (ODESC) for this purpose, and currently spends only 10% of his time at EAB

The Ministry of Health (MoH), the agency leading intergovernmental coordination and planning through the Intersectoral Pandemic Group (IPG), has taken a "maximum credible event" approach to planning for avian influenza pandemic

Under this approach MoH models assume a pandemic wave in which 40% of the NZ population will become ill over an eight-week period with a 2% fatality rate (33,000 deaths in the eight-week period)

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(C) It is difficult to conceive of the government placing higher priority on the issue

In October, Prime Minister Helen Clark appointed Pete Hodgson as Minister of Health

As the only scientist among the Labour-government's members, Hodgson is well-regarded for his management capability and subject-matter expertise

During the last term of government, Hodgson had ministerial responsibility for energy, fisheries, research & technology, and the Crown Research Institutes, and was the government's resident expert on climate change

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(C) KEY CONTACT: The Embassy's principal liaison with the government of New Zealand on avian flu issues is Marlene Castle, External Assessments Bureau (EAB)

EAB is located in the Prime Minister's office and is responsible for monitoring and analyzing world events for the PM and Cabinet officials

Castle is a chemical and biological weapons expert and has been following the avian flu epidemic for the last two years

She is also heavily involved in GNZ's contingency planning should a pandemic strike here, and regularly briefs the Prime Minister on the disease's trajectory

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(U) REVIEW OF LAWS: As part of the Influenza Pandemic Action Plan, the GNZ is assessing the legal authorities applicable to its planned actions in response to each of the WHO-designated pandemic phases

Much of the specific legal authority it cited within the plan, and will be updated during subsequent plan versions

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(C) MULTILATERAL COOPERATION: New Zealand is working closely with the World Health Organization and the government of Australia

Castle indicates that GNZ officials have nearly "constant touch" with WHO and Australian officials

The government has recognized that New Zealand does not have the capacity to manufacture human vaccines, and has thus secured an agreement with an Australia-based manufacturer to get priority access to vaccines in the event of a future influenza pandemic

During an actual pandemic, particularly if the agreed supplier is incapable of supplying a vaccine, the government may seek assistance from Australia, the US or other countries for vaccine assistance

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(U) ANNUAL FLU VACCINES: New Zealand has a mature program for administering annual influenza vaccines, but does not have the local capacity to manufacture human vaccines

Instead annual influenza vaccines are purchased from vendors in Australia, who formulate the vaccine with input from the governments of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa and the World Health Organization

The vaccines are formulated for the Southern hemisphere winter and the flu season from April to September.

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(C) PUBLIC INFORMATION: The planning group has begun to implement a public education campaign, including significant information now available on the Ministry of Health website cited paragraph 1 of this cable

Other ministries and departments have begun publishing information on websites including Biosecurity New Zealand and the Ministry for Economic Development

Other steps are being considered, including pamphlets

Information on whom to contact in case of a pandemic are now included in a prominent place in New Zealand phone directories

The aim of GNZ's outreach efforts is to educate without inducing panic

Local media has provided frequent coverage of avian influenza both globally and locally, and even in rural areas the public is well-informed although probably poorly prepared with provisional supplies and coping strategies

Surveillance/Detection -----13

(C) CAPABILITY TO DETECT AND SUBTYPE: New Zealand surveillance system can effectively isolate and detect new strains of influenza both among people and animals, and New Zealand should be able to properly diagnose cases in short order

There is a relatively low level of endemic disease among animal species

Influenza viruses can be subtyped in country, principally by the government owned entity Institute for Environmental Science and Research Limited, as demonstrated during the 2004 flu season

During 2004, an influenza A substrain was first isolated in New Zealand; the virus was later determined to have originated in Southern China

The strain will be formulated into the 2005 seasonal flu vaccine

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(C) CRITICAL GAPS: New Zealand's greatest weakness appears to be its local inability to manufacture human vaccines

Response/Containment -----15

(C) STOCKPILES: The Government of New Zealand has acquired 855,000 doses of the antiviral oseltamivir (Tamiflu), sufficient to treat 21% of the population

MOH has further recognized the need for District Health Boards (DHBs) to consider the need to build their own supplies of anti-viral drugs, over above the levels held in the national stockpile

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(U) CULLING AND OTHER ANIMAL MEASURES: MAF has authority under the Biosecurity Act of 1993 to respond to organism incursions through control or eradication

Biosecurity New Zealand, a component of MAF, has included eradication/culling within its planning framework.

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(SBU) QUARANTINE AND SOCIAL DISTANCING: Given the short-run lack of a

vaccine and limited antiviral supplies, quarantine and social distancing measures are the principal means considered by the government for a future pandemic virus that enters New Zealand

These measures include: recommending that sick people stay home; advising the public against unnecessary travel; utilizing the powers of medical officers of health to cancel public events; closing child care facilities, schools and tertiary education institutions; removal and detention for individuals suspected of infection with avian influenza; compulsory treatment; authority to use other areas as a hospital or place of isolation; and use of police and defence forces to isolate infected areas and prevent travel to uninfected islands

McCormick