

100,000 bird flu vaccine doses to be destroyed

In the next couple of months, 100,000 doses of the country's first vaccine against bird flu will be destroyed because the laboratory that developed it has found no takers and the expiry date is fast approaching.

It was in July last year that the High Security Animal Disease Laboratory (HSADL) here developed India's first vaccine against bird flu. It had preserved about 100,000 doses of the vaccine, each costing just 27 paise.

But no drug manufacturing company has contacted the research institute so far to buy either these doses or the formula for commercial use, an official of the institute said on condition of anonymity.

'We are now left with no option but to destroy them after 10 weeks or so since the total life of the doses is one year. They would turn ineffective after 12 months from the date of their preparation,' he rued.

Talking about the vaccine's efficacy, he said: 'The vaccine can be used immediately after a bird flu outbreak to control the spread of the virus as well as for vaccination in anticipation of an outbreak.'

'The immune response is good and the protection offered by the vaccine has been found to be above 90 percent. The protection should last up to six months for hens. For a broiler it needs to be administered only once.'

HSADL, which is equipped with the technique of identifying the avian influenza virus among poultry, tested thousands of bird samples including droppings of migratory birds last year after the first strains of the deadly H5N1 virus were detected in western Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

'The Indian Council of Agricultural Research entrusted us with the job of developing the vaccine soon after the first outbreak of the disease in February 2006 and also promptly provided us Rs.80 million to help us accomplish the challenging task,' said HSADL Joint Director H.K. Pradhan.

Pradhan and his special team of scientists swung into action, toiling day and night, and developed the vaccine in less than six months after the outbreak.

'The cost of the vaccine has been worked out at 27 paise per dose. It is expected to go up to 35 paise including the trader's profit and cost of transportation. But it will be for the company manufacturing the vaccine to decide on the selling price,' Pradhan said.

Sanjay Sharma (© IANS / India eNews)