



Highlights of [GAO-07-604](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2003, a global epidemic of avian influenza has raised concern about the risk of an influenza pandemic among humans, which could cause millions of deaths. The United States and its international partners have begun implementing a strategy to forestall (prevent or delay) a pandemic and prepare to cope should one occur. Disease experts generally agree that the risk of a pandemic strain emerging from avian influenza in a given country varies with (1) environmental factors, such as disease presence and certain high-risk farming practices, and (2) preparedness factors, such as a country's capacity to control outbreaks.

This report describes (1) U.S. and international efforts to assess pandemic risk by country and prioritize countries for assistance and (2) steps that the United States and international partners have taken to improve the ability to forestall a pandemic.

To address these objectives, we interviewed officials and analyzed data from U.S. agencies, international organizations, and nongovernmental experts.

The U.S. and international agencies whose efforts we describe reviewed a draft of this report. In general, they concurred with our findings. Several provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-604.

To view the full product, including scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact D. Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov or M. Crosse at (202) 512-7114 or crossesem@gao.gov.

INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Efforts to Forestall Onset Are Under Way; Identifying Countries at Highest Risk Entails Challenges

What GAO Found

Assessments by U.S. agencies and international organizations have identified widespread risks of the emergence of pandemic influenza and the United States has identified priority countries for assistance, but information gaps limit the capacity for comprehensive comparisons of risk levels by country. Several assessments we examined, which have considered environmental or preparedness-related risks or both, illustrate these gaps. For example, a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) assessment categorized countries according to the level of environmental risk—considering factors such as disease presence and the likelihood of transmission from nearby countries, but factors such as limited understanding of the role of poultry trade or wild birds constrain the reliability of the conclusions. Further, USAID, the State Department, and the United Nations have administered questionnaires to assess country preparedness and World Bank-led missions have gathered detailed information in some countries, but these efforts do not provide a basis for making comprehensive global comparisons. Efforts to get better information are under way but will take time. The U.S. Homeland Security Council has designated priority countries for assistance, and agencies have further identified several countries as meriting the most extensive efforts, but officials acknowledge that these designations are based on limited information.

The United States has played a prominent role in global efforts to improve avian and pandemic influenza preparedness, committing the greatest share of funds and creating a framework for managing its efforts. Through 2006, the United States had committed about \$377 million, 27 percent of the \$1.4 billion committed by all donors. USAID and the Department of Health and Human Services have provided most of these funds for a range of efforts, including stockpiles of protective equipment and training foreign health professionals in outbreak response. The State Department coordinates international efforts and the Homeland Security Council monitors progress. More than a third of U.S. and overall donor commitments have gone to individual countries, with more than 70 percent of those going to U.S. priority countries. The U.S. *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan* provides a framework for U.S. international efforts, assigning agencies specific action items and specifying performance measures and time frames for completion. The Homeland Security Council reported in December 2006 that all international actions due to be completed by November had been completed, and provided evidence of timely completion for the majority of those items.