

Medical Faculty

Institute for Medical Microbiology and Hygiene
Professor Dr. med. Sucharit Bhakdi

Association of the German
Down and Feather Association
Attention: Ms. Juliane Hedderich
Manager
Thomas-Mann-Str. 9a

55122 Mainz

Mainz, 6 February, 2004

Avian influenza in Asia – Virus H5N1

Dear Ms Hedderich:

In the following I would like to explain my opinion about the import ban on raw feathers from Asia. As I see it, after arrival in Europe, the feathers are washed at high temperatures. This procedure definitely destroys all influenza viruses. Thus, provided that the conveyor chain is not interrupted until the washing procedure is conducted there is no infection risk.

Moreover, it shall be stated that the influenza virus does not belong to the group of cloaked viruses. These viruses are provided with a lipids case taken from the membrane of the host cell. The lipids case can easily be destructed and a virus with a destroyed case is no longer infectious. It is almost impossible that the influenza virus on feathers can remain infectious for months. It would be interesting to find out, if feathers desiccate at any moment during this long period of transport and processing: It is guaranteed that the virus case cannot outlive dryness.

I am not aware of any publication from which can be gathered that a cloaked virus like the influenza virus can remain infectious for weeks or even months in the alive environment. In my opinion, such a serious measure like putting an import ban on feathers shall not be taken without solid substantiation. In particular, the responsible authorities should supply evidence that infectious viruses might actually exist. This could be proved for instance by simultaneous experiments: Prospectively, it would be stated that viruses are no longer infectious after a few days already. Furthermore, samples from the available material could be taken at random and tested. They would also quickly lead to clear and negative results. Hence, in my opinion by default of positive results, the import ban which causes disastrous consequences to the people concerned is baseless from the scientific point of view, and thus condemnable.

Sincerely Yours

signature

Sucharit Bhakdi