Reviewer's report


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Reviewer: Daniel Barnett

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In this well-written manuscript, the authors present findings from a series of seven consecutive Internet-based surveys conducted in the Netherlands from 2006-2007, on avian influenza-related risk perception and precautionary behaviors. The survey approach benefits from its incorporation of a defined behavioral model (Protection Motivation Theory), as well as its inclusion of actual self-reported preventive behaviors during the study period. These surveys' findings have potentially significant policy value, and the authors are correct to emphasize the critical importance of non-pharmaceutical interventions in their interpretation of the study's implications. The authors appropriately acknowledge the surveys' lack of temporal detail on precautionary behaviors as a study limitation.

Major Compulsory Revisions
- On p. 1, the authors state: "So far, human AI infections were limited to people who had been in close contact with (wild) birds or poultry." However, isolated, non-sustained probable human-to-human H5N1 transmission has been reported in the research literature prior to the current study's survey window [Ungchusak et al. N Engl J Med 2005; 352(4): 333-40]. Despite the above evidence, the current study absolutely states that "false" is the "correct" answer to the following statement: "The avian influenza virus can be transmitted from human to human" (p. 12). The authors need to reconcile the above apparent discrepancy with respect to their surveys' "knowledge" content, and address this as a potential limitation of the survey instrument.

Minor Essential Revisions
- On p. 19, the authors state that HIV is a "rare" disease and "rather unfamiliar in the population at large"; the authors need to refine and contextualize these statements, and provide literature support for them.

Discretionary Revisions
- It would be interesting and useful for the authors to address the seeming paradox on pp. 16-17, in which preventive measures were taken more often by respondents who had "less knowledge".


Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.