Author's response to reviews

Title: Epidemiology of the avian influenza A (H7N9) outbreak in Zhejiang Province, China

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editors and Reviewers,

Thank you for your meticulous review report on our manuscript entitled ‘High proportion of rural residents and multi-exposure history in human cases of avian influenza A (H7N9) virus in Zhejiang Province, China’ (3928958211135338). We have studied your comments carefully and have made corrections that we hope will meet with your approval. The main corrections in the paper and our responses to the editors’ and reviewers’ comments are as follows:

Response to Hongjie Yu’s comments:

1. Comment: The manuscript would greatly benefit by editing by a native English writer with scientific writing experience.

Response: We have hired a native English professional with a science background to revise our manuscript.

2. Comment: In the abstract and introduction, I suggest that the authors update the number of H7N9 patients till the end of 2013.

Response: We revise relative data.

3. Comment: In the methods, the last phrase of the case definition is unclear – “or recent exposure to poultry was defined as a suspected case.” Please rephrase. The language in this paragraph overall should be improved

Response: We rewrite relative sentences.

4. Comment: Figure 5 and Figure 6 should be deleted.

Response: We delete the two figures and relative sentences.
Thank you again for your valuable comments.

Response to Wei Tang’s comments:

1. Comment: About epidemiologic and clinical characteristics of H7N9 infection, many papers have been published during the past year, although “the number of patients in Zhejiang Province is the largest in China”, the amount of new insights into or new connections between previously reported data is low in this paper.
Response: Compared to previously reported data, more cases were from rural areas, some cases had multi-exposure history, and the estimated median incubation period was shorted in Zhejiang Province. The other characteristics were similar to corresponding data in previously reported data.

2. Comment: The data of case is a little old. Till May 2013, 46 cases of H7N9 infection have been reported according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission of China (http://www.moh.gov.cn/mohwsyjbgs/dfdt/201304/7bc42d8cc6a84da999436c31b3ab3262.shtml). Currently, there are more cases have been reported according to the Health Department of Zhejiang province (http://www.zjwst.gov.cn/collcol362/index.html), especially in January and February, 2014. Although the authors have mentioned that “five cases of influenza A (H7N9) infection were confirmed in Zhejiang Province since October 15”, but the data analysis in the paper still focus on 46 cases. So the analysis on up to date information will be better.
Response: We are very sorry for our old data. But this manuscript was written in October, 2013. There are two outbreaks of H7N9 infections and the first outbreak occurred between April and May 2013, the second outbreak occurred between October 2013 and February 2014. In this study, we summarized epidemiological characteristics of the first outbreak and data on the second outbreak were showed in another manuscript which was reviewed in another journal. So we can’t update the data and we have to revise the title of our paper.

3. Comment: The authors try to provide a new viewpoint that “the proportion of rural residents in H7N9 cases from Zhejiang Province was 34.79% (16/46) which was significantly higher than that of other provinces”, but there are no detailed data that in other provinces were provided in this paper, and the authors cannot give a well explanation about this difference. It is just described in the paper - “more than 1/3 of cases occurred in rural areas in our study. The reason behind this may be the acceleration of the integration of urban and rural areas in Zhejiang Province…..Another reason may be that poultry in rural areas had been infected with the novel H7N9 virus via birds. However, we can’t explain whether cases in rural areas acquired their infections from live poultry markets or poultry bred in their home.”

Response: we add detailed data in previously reported data and more explanations about this difference.

4. Comment: About the conclusion of “Control measures are needed not only in urban areas but also in rural areas reduce human H7N9 infection risk”, the reasons of and
the detailed measures that should be implemented in rural areas cannot be provided in
the paper.

Response: We add reasons and the detailed measures that should be implemented in
rural areas.

5. Comment: In this paper, weather data in Hangzhou city and Huzhou city were also
provided, but the relationship between analyzed data and the conclusion of “Human
H7N9 infections may re-emerge as temperature drops” cannot been well explained.

Response: We delete weather data.

6. Comment: About the proportion of rural residents in H7N9 cases from Zhejiang
Province, it was described as “34.78%” in Abstract in page 2, but it was “34.79%” in
page 8.

Response: We check the accuracy of the data and revise wrong data.

Thank you again for your valuable comments.

We have tried our best to improve the manuscript by responding to your comments
and making changes to the manuscript accordingly. We appreciate the work carried
out by the Editors and Reviewers, and hope that these corrections will meet with your
approval.

Once again, thank you very much for your comments and suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

Enfu Chen