Reviewer's report

Title: Protective measures and H5N1-seroprevalence among personnel tasked with bird collection during an outbreak of avian influenza A/H5N1 in wild birds, Ruegen, Germany, 2006

Version: 1 Date: 21 June 2009

Reviewer: Marianne A.B. van der Sande

Reviewer's report:

One year after an influenza A/H5N1 outbreak among wild birds, a retrospective survey was held among staff involved in culling activities to assess adherence to recommended protective measures, and to explore associations with clinical and serological markers of infections.

This study is of interest to evaluate and improve future similar activities, but could also be of relevance to explore issues related to potential promotion of personal protective measures by the general public.

There are just a few issues to address still:

- The authors should modify their conclusion that compliance among firemen was significantly better than among government employees. As only 55% of invited firemen responded versus 88% of government employees, it can not be excluded that selection bias among firemen was responsible for this difference.

- It is unclear how and how many people were approached and were recruited to participate in the culling. Was this approach and participation the same among all groups studied? How large a sample has been included in this study, and how characteristic are they of the group they represent? Again, this can have introduced bias in the comparison between professional groups.

- What risk factor data were collected in the questionnaire except profession, age and sex?

- It is unclear why only the association between occupation and adherence is reported. Eg was this modified by age, or other variables?

Minor comments:

- Maybe the discussion could include a paragraph on whether any lessons can be learned regarding the preparation, impact and follow up of an advice to the general public to use personal protective measures, such as social distancing, hand washing, mask wearing?

- I would suggest to use the more active 'adherence', rather than the passive 'compliance'.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
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'