Reviewer’s report

Title: Impact of prolonged warning on public fatigue: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Hong Kong population towards pandemic preparedness of human A/H7N9 influenza epidemic in China in 2014

Version: 3 Date: 19 March 2015

Reviewer: Pierre Verger

Reviewer’s report:

1) Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The objective of the study is not precisely stated; it is rather general and includes different issues and many different kinds of potential determinants of people practices regarding their protection behavior against an epidemic. I would suggest testing 1 or 2 specific hypotheses.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

There several aspects of the method section which are unclear:

= the “instrument” section does not include several variables that are used later in the analysis.

= the sentence: “Quota balanced age, sex… were set towards the end of the survey” is particularly unclear: did the authors apply a quota sampling method? If yes, did they apply specific statistical methods to calculate confidence intervals? Or do they mean that they simply weighted the data?

= Regarding the multivariate analysis, the criteria of entry and exit of the tested explicative variables should be presented; the way the dependent variable and some explicative variables (e.g. variable on attitudes towards preventive measures) were constructed should be presented in the “statistical analysis” section.

3. Are the data sound?

Some items of the questionnaires look somewhat awkward:

What does “preference for surveillance and information” mean (line 128)?

Same question for “H7N6 will adopt human to human transmission in the current year);

The reviewer also wonder how people could answer the following question: “Compared to other metropolitan cities, Hong Kong’s preparedness for infectious disease outbreak is better”: are Hong Kong residents supposed to be aware of epidemics preparedness in other cities?

The notion of “good” attitudes or practices is questionable and should be avoided; the authors should opt for a neutral adjective.
4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?

The reviewer can’t say.

5. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The results section should be written in a more concise way to avoid redundancy with the tables or some tables could be omitted.

Table 5 which present the results of the multivariate analysis, should not be proposed as supplementary material.

6. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

The discussion about misuse of self-medicated antibiotics for the treatment of influenza (line 282) is not related to the study results (which did not address this specific point). Same comment regarding delayed medical consultations (line 283).

The notion of “public fatigue” is unclear and not defined in the article: it is thus difficult to understand the extent to which the results of the study support this notion: repeated epidemics warnings could also induce banalization of influenza epidemics; or people could also feel that, given their perception that the epidemics was not severe as announced by the authorities, they would easily cope with it with simple measures.

The paragraph regarding confidence in the local government calls for explanations about how frequently and according to which modalities Hong Kong residents were informed about the various specific measures taken by the authorities to prevent the epidemics.

7. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

The authors insist on a potential limitation of their study (missing households without a land-based telephone line) when the penetration rate of fixed lines in Hong Kong is greater than 100% (?). This figure should be checked and explained. They do not address the classical limitations of cross-sectional surveys based on people declarations.

8. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

The authors do not cite previous work on which they would have based their study, to the best of the reviewers’ understanding.

9. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The title is (too) long and does not accurately reflect what can be reasonably concluded from this study. The term “public fatigue” is unclear and the term “pandemic preparedness” is ambiguous. The authors do not study the extent to
which Hong Kong residents feel prepared to cope with a new influenza epidemic; authors have implemented a study during an epidemic and evaluated individual preventive practices; some of them are endorsed by the majority of the respondents while some other are not. A possible explanation lies in attitudes of banalization of influenza epidemics which in turn raises questions regarding authorities’ strategy of communication to the public.

10. Is the writing acceptable?
Writing should be extensively revised.