

## **Possible Impacts**

### **a) Worst-case scenario**

#### **Causes**

The current protections we have against the H5N1 viruses are few and far between, with nothing new expected in the immediate future. While the race is on to develop vaccines and drugs to counter the virus, these would take months to develop and years to produce enough quantity to treat the estimated amount of casualties. Also, many countries are unwilling to commit large amounts of resources to prepare for a disaster that might not even happen. The United States, for example, is still diverting a large amount of their resources towards defence, sparing only a fraction of the amount to help develop an anti-viral drug.

-Not enough has been done, vaccines are currently unavailable, and it will take at least six to nine months for it to be developed and a further several months to manufacture enough doses for the world.

-Anti-viral drugs are also being produced relatively slowly.

#### **Impact Worldwide**

If the virus does indeed mutate into the kind that is easily communicable amongst humans, and if it strikes in the immediate future, say next month, or even tomorrow, the world will be thrown into chaos. The already tense state of fear with regard to the possibility of such an occurrence will explode; millions of people worldwide will be scrambling for some of the already scarce supply of anti-viral drugs. Prevention measures such as screening will be carried out at airports and immigration checkpoints, however the symptoms might take as long as 2 days from the time of infection to surface, plenty of time for thousands of infected individuals to slip into the country. As the pandemic spreads and shows no sign of weakening, investors and traders will rush to sell off their stocks, businesses in affected areas will close as employees are in fear of contracting the deadly disease, leading to the crashing of markets worldwide and economic breakdown in much of the developed world. But that is only the start.

As the pandemic marches on, hospitals become overwhelmed; social unrest is widespread as people fight to get a hold of anti-viral drugs, which are now kept under tight control in order to ensure that only those that really need them get them. Local law enforcement and military forces will be spread thin as manpower will be in short supply resulting from personnel either fall sick or refuse to participate for fear of contracting the disease. The same will go for healthcare services as hospitals run out of drugs and adequate medical equipment. The government is in disarray, unsure how to deal with the devastating situation unfolding before their eyes. They institute martial law to control the spike in civil disorder, but without the proper enforcement, it comes to naught. Meanwhile,

families are advised to stay home and in an effort to lessen the load on healthcare services, the sick are told to only approach the hospitals if there are severely ill.

By now mass burials will be commonplace, industries and economies are crippled as whole countries come to a standstill. The basic amenities are scarce, and people are struggling to survive. The death toll stands at 100 million and could reach 150 million before the pandemic subsides.

9 weeks after the first cases were reported, the worldwide death toll stands at 130 million, and finally the pandemic begins to subside. However, there is more to come. Experts predict a second wave will arrive soon, and the scientific community scrambles to find a cure.

Such is the worst-case scenario feared by many experts and scientists today.

-Screening will be done at immigration, but the symptoms take two days to show, plenty of time for thousands of infected individuals to slip through.

-The outbreak causes an economic catastrophe as businesses shut down and traders frantically rush to sell their shares in the light of the pandemic.

-Social unrest as anti-viral drugs are scarce and limited to medical facilities. People will fight to get a hold of these drugs.

-Hospitals are overwhelmed, equipment is in short supply and drugs run out.

-Doctors face tough decisions as to who will get care.

-About 20% of those admitted to hospitals will die.

-Mass burials as burial services are overwhelmed.

-Civil disorder spiral out of control

-Industry is crippled, economies are in ruins.

-The death toll stands at 100 million and could reach 150 million before the pandemic subsides.

-Basic amenities are scarce as whole countries come to a standstill.

-Worldwide death toll stands at over 130 million.

-Second wave expected soon.

## **b) Opposing ideas**

However, there are those who believe that the H5N1 virus does not pose a threat to mankind. Some believe that if H5N1 were to mutate into a virus transmissible between humans, it would have already done so. Others believe that if H5N1 were to mutate into such a virus, it would become less deadly. This theory is based on the concept natural selection, if a virus is so deadly that hosts are quickly killed, before it can be transmitted to many people, with the right measures, it will die out as quickly as it appears. Support for this theory can be seen during the 2003 SARS scare. The virus was deadly, however, it was quickly brought under control as patients were quickly quarantined and it failed to transmit, eventually dying out.

Another reason for skepticism is the relatively low infection rate of the virus. Of millions of people in contact with probably billions of infected birds, only about 200 people have been infected. This is in stark contrast to past pandemics where infection rates are very high amongst those exposed.