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Title

The effect of avian influenza in the information service of the National Public Health Institute of Finland

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Abstract

This presentation describes the effect of avian influenza and the threat of pandemic influenza in the information service of the National Public Health Institute of Finland. During spring 2006 the information service received a great number of questions from the public, before the national Avian influenza helpline was established. Information specialists answered questions regarding to people's concerns of how the avian influenza could spread and how to protect against it.

In the answers, we referred to published sources and in some cases forwarded the questions to influenza specialists. We also acted as mediators between the specialist and the questioner. The anxiety behind the questions was enormous. Due to this experience it is clear that also the Information Services personnel need to consider their role and activity in possible pandemic situations.

This presentation discusses the role of information specialist as a representative of his or her organization and as the mediator of information sources, both published and unpublished. Also the role of information specialists in crisis communication and as a part of his or her organization's emergency communication is considered.