

NPHL Goes to Thailand

By Josh Rowland, State Training Coordinator, NPHL

The avian influenza virus (H5N1) is a potential cause of pandemic disease if viral adaptation should impart sustained human-to-human transmission with a presentation of highly virulent features. Surveillance activities supported by laboratory procedures could prove vital to contain the disease should pandemic conditions arise. The United States government, through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has thus offered financial and technical assistance to underdeveloped countries to build laboratory capacity to support surveillance activities. As the need to have world-wide surveillance for the virus continues to spread, the CDC recently requested volunteers from public health laboratories with experience in the laboratory procedures used to detect avian influenza virus, to assist in providing technical support.

Bob Wickert, molecular microbiologist for the NPHL, applied to participate and was subsequently assigned to a team conducting laboratory workshops in Bangkok, Thailand.

The original workshop he conducted was from April 24th to 28th. He returned to Bangkok and also participated in a workshop from July 17th to 21st. (See photo above) Laboratorians from the surrounding countries of Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, India, Nepal, Laos, and the Philippines, along with staff from Thailand's provincial laboratories spent time learning principles of the real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) assay for avian influenza virus detection. The workshop included formal lectures given in English, as well as experiences in RNA extraction, real-time PCR assay set-up, result analysis, and trouble-shooting.

Bob shared that most of the participants were experienced laboratorians and some had prior experience with standard PCR assays. Therefore, the techniques were not difficult to teach and all participants had successful results. The workshop participants and volunteer staff were also given the opportunity to socialize in a welcome reception hosted by the Thai Ministry of Public Health. This included a fun night of eating, drinking, dancing and karaoke singing which will long be remembered as the highlight of the workshop. Bob felt that the pleasant manner of the Thai staff and their genuine hospitality will go a long way to promote cooperation between these Southeastern Asian countries as they provide surveillance for the avian influenza virus.

For more information about avian influenza virus testing, please contact Bob Wickert at rwickert@unmc.edu or 402-559-2123.



Participants in the April avian influenza virus workshop in Bangkok included: Ms. Trinh Thi Xuan Mai from Nha Trang, Vietnam; Ms. Punnarai Veeraseatakul from Chiang Mai, Thailand; Ms. Triyani Soekarso from Jakarta, Indonesia, and Bob Wickert, Molecular Microbiologist, NPHL.