World Organisation for Animal Health

中华人民共和国农业农村部
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China

From the People of Japan

Australian Aid

Infodemic management

In animal and zoonotic health

Ms Elise Pierrat, WOAH



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What could this message change?

FICTIONAL TRAINING EXAMPLE

Poultry keepers' group

Forwarded message

If you report sick birds, the authorities will destroy every animal on your farm. There will be no compensation.

What might a poultry keeper do after reading this?

An infodemic is an information epidemic

Too much to process	Accurate advice competes with speculation, outdated posts and false claims.
Online and offline	Messaging groups, radio, markets, families and veterinary visits all matter.
A response task	Understand concerns, close information gaps and support safer decisions.
The practical test	Can people find, understand and act on the advice they need?

Different problems

Misinformation	False or misleading information shared without intent to deceive.
Disinformation	False or manipulated information deliberately spread to deceive or cause harm.
Rumour	A circulating claim whose accuracy has not yet been verified.
Information gap	An unanswered question: “What happens after I report a sick animal?”

Misinformation, disinformation or an unverified rumour?

A A seller knowingly fabricates a ministry notice to promote a fake cure.

B A message says a nearby village has unusual animal deaths. No verification yet.

C A farmer unknowingly shares an old outbreak map as today’s situation.

Animal health rumours can change the outbreak

Animal health consequences

Delayed reporting

Animals moved before restrictions

Avoidance of vaccination or veterinary care

Wider consequences

Unsafe human exposure

Stigma against farmers or communities

Food fears and loss of income

What can we do: a workable cycle for a small team

Before an outbreak	Prepare contacts, approval routes and answers to predictable questions.
Listen and verify	Gather concerns/questions, check evidence and identify the affected audience.
Prioritise and respond	Choose a proportionate response, a trusted messenger and a useful channel.
Check and adapt	Test understanding and behaviour, then update advice/response.

Social listening during an outbreak

Where to listen

Online: Search public social media for outbreak keywords. Use a monitoring tool if available (Google trends or other).

Offline: Listen to stakeholders, local radio, vets and community partners.

What to do with what you hear

Look for questions and concerns that keep coming up.

Record what people are asking, where it came up and what needs checking.

Example: Vets keep hearing, “Will I lose my birds if I report?” Check the policy and explain what happens after a report.

Verification comes before correction

What would you check before replying?



Which claims need a public response?

Urgent harm	Misinformed advice could cause unsafe exposure or undermine outbreak controls: act quickly.
Growing concern	Repeated questions across affected groups: give a targeted explanation.
Limited circulation	Little reach and low harm: monitor and answer directly where useful.
Threats or fraud	Fake official accounts, scams or threats: save the evidence and escalate internally. Warn affected audiences through official channels if they need to take action to protect themselves.

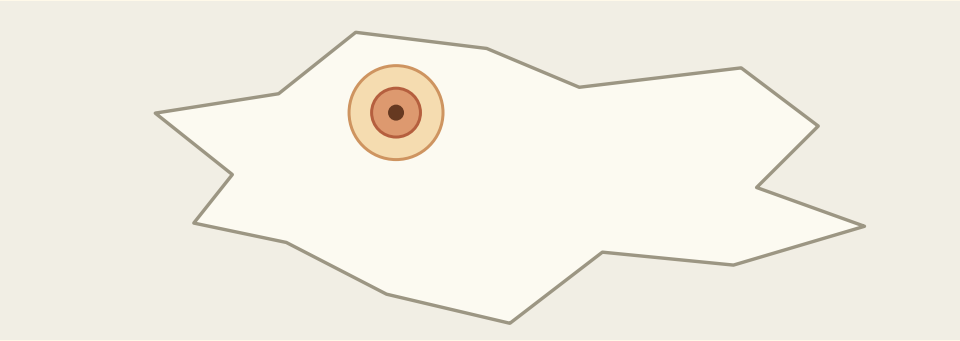
A correction people can use

A useful structure

Verified fact / Concern / Explanation / Action

“We understand that reporting sick birds may raise concerns about your farm’s work. Reporting allows veterinary teams to assess the situation. Measures depend on that assessment and current rules. Contact your local Veterinary Services for advice on reporting and any available support.”

Example of a useful correction



An old map to show an outbreak location is circulating as today’s news

“Fake news. Stop sharing this.”

“This map shows a past outbreak. Check today’s Veterinary Services notice for any current restrictions.”

Which reply helps someone decide what to do next?

When people want an answer you do not have

QUESTION FROM A LOCAL RADIO LISTENER

“Is this disease a risk to my family?”

What is confirmed	“We are investigating the animal illness. We do not yet know its cause.”
What happens next	“Veterinary and public health teams are assessing the evidence together.”
Action and update	Give verified interim advice, a contact and a realistic time for the next update.

How will we know if it helped?

Understanding	Can farmers explain what to report and whom to contact?
Trust and access	Do people accept visits and know where to ask questions?
Behaviour	Are reporting delays, unsafe movements or harmful practices changing?
Feedback	Which questions persist? What needs a clearer answer or operational fix?

WOAH and INTERPOL guidance

WOAH and INTERPOL (2024)
Countering disinformation and misinformation in animal health emergencies
https://doi.org/10.20506/woah.3472

