



COVID-19: Coordinating from an animal health perspective during a human pandemic

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CENTRE FOR ANIMAL HEALTH

On 13 January 2020, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Emergency Management Centre for Animal Health (EMC-AH) began monitoring the COVID-19 outbreak as it rapidly developed in China.

The Centre collaborated with its emergency counterpart at the World Health Organization (WHO), the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, to provide situational updates to partners and, in close collaboration with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), address any queries on the role of animal health in the developing situation.

As global lead in the coordination of animal health events, on 29 January 2020, EMC-AH activated a COVID-19 incident coordination group (ICG), to coordinate from the animal health perspective.

Incident coordination groups (ICG): What do they do?

For large-scale animal health emergencies that require system-wide mobilization, EMC-AH is committed to leading the global coordination of animal health emergencies with severe impacts on food security and livelihoods. The Centre operates with the support of donors such as Australia, Canada, France, Japan, and the United States of America.

Once activated, ICGs serve to:

- set the overall strategy for the preparedness, response, and coordination of animal health events;
- align the efforts of animal health, public health, environmental and food security experts at all levels; and
- promote cooperation and collaboration among animal health organizations, key partners, and relevant sectors (public health, environmental, food).

An animal health ICG covering COVID-19: Why?

For people around the world at high risk of acute food insecurity, or for those in situations that threaten their livelihoods, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic present a massive added threat. Monitoring the evolution of the event and contributing to international efforts to coordinate the response with a focus on animal health is essential to protect vulnerable populations and ensure good communication between all relevant parties.

What does the COVID-19 ICG aim to achieve?

Through a multisectoral approach at the global, regional and national levels, the FAO COVID-19 ICG aims to:

- Work jointly with OIE and WHO on risk communication materials to minimize misinformation and maximize clear and correct messaging.
- Coordinate internal technical efforts to develop key messages and maintain FAO staff informed on FAO's actions relating to the COVID-19 outbreak (e.g. frequent internal briefs showcasing FAO's work on COVID-19, a regularly updated dedicated web page linking to OIE and WHO COVID-19 web pages).
- Focus on how best to address animal health and food security issues in the context of COVID-19.
- Contribute to support the international coordination of the response and the affected countries with FAO's technical expertise in animal health, livelihood assessment and food security.
- Gather high-level technical expertise to share guidance on various topics, such as laboratory, risk assessments and guidelines for continuity of business in the agricultural sector.
- Coordinate, in a strategic manner, any request for support received from the regional and national levels.
- Gather and share experience between regions on maintaining animal health operations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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